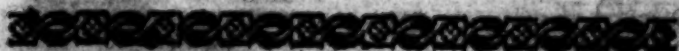


A  
V O Y A G E  
TO, AND  
H I S T O R Y  
O F,  
*St. K I L D A.*



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A  
V O Y A G E  
TO, AND  
H I S T O R Y  
O F,  
*St. K I L D A.*

CONTAINING

A Description of this remarkable Island;  
The Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants;  
The Religious and Pagan Antiquities there  
found;

With many other curious and interesting  
Particulars.

---

By the Rev. Mr. KENNETH MACAULAY,  
Minister of *Ardnamurchan*.

Missionary to the Island, from the Society for  
Propagating Christian Knowledge.

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D U B L I N :

Printed by JAMES HOBY, jun. in *Parliament-Street*,  
within four doors of *Essex-Street*, on the  
right hand coming from the Bridge.

M.DCC.LXV.

V O Y A G E

H I S T O R Y

SA K I L D A

The Religion and History of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and of the Colonies of the Netherlands



By the Rev. Mr. KENNETH MACALEXANDER, Minister of the Gospel, Glasgow.

Printed by J. Macfarlane, Glasgow.

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# CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION. Page i

## CHAP. I.

*A Voyage to St. Kilda.—Occurrences.* 5

## CHAP. II.

*A description of St. Kilda.* 20

## CHAP. III.

*Of the St. Kilda Houses. — Of the Staller's House, and a Druidical Place of Worship in the Island of Boreray.* 39

CHAP.

# C O N T E N T S.

## C H A P. IV.

*Of the Churches, or old religious Buildings, and  
some reliëts of Paganism in St. Kilda.*

Page 58

## C H A P. V.

*The same subject continued.*

70

## C H A P. VI.

*Of the sacred fountains of St. Kilda. Culdees  
once there. Hirta, the true name of that  
Island.*

83

## C H A P. VII.

*Boreray and Soay described. An account of  
the Land Animals there, and in the principal  
Island.*

104

## C H A P. VIII.

*Of the Sea and Land Fowls at Hirta.*

117

C H A P.

# CONTENTS.

## CHAP. IX.

*Of Augurs and Auspices.* Page 143

## CHAP. X.

*Of the St. Kilda methods of catching wild fowl.* 160

## CHAP. XI.

*Of the people of Hirta. Their number, diseases, persons, dress, language, genius, manners and customs.* 173

## CHAP. XII.

*Of the state of Religion at St. Kilda, in different periods.* 198

## CHAP. XIII.

*Whether St. Kilda be a place proper for a Fishery.* 217

## CHAP.



# CONTENTS.

## CHAP. XIV.

*Of the first inhabitants of Hirta. Its revolutions, and present state.* Page 226

## CONCLUSION.

238

## INTRO.

## INTRODUCTION.

**T**HE island of *St. Kilda* may be ranked among the greatest curiosities of the *British* Empire. The situation of the place, the genius of its inhabitants, their manners and customs, the constitution of their little Commonwealth, that amazing dexterity with which they manage the most important branches of their business, that unexampled courage, with which they encounter dangers insurmountable to any other race of men, and that, perhaps, happy ignorance, which renders them absolute strangers to those extravagant desires and endless pursuits, which keep the great and active world in a constant agitation: all these, and some

B

other

## ii INTRODUCTION.

other extraordinary circumstances, taken together at one view, seem highly to merit the attention of the Inquisitive.

It is hardly necessary, I presume, to inform the publick, that the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge, take a peculiar concern in the people of that island. — Animated by a primitive zeal, and a disinterested benevolence of the most exalted kind, they have been for above half a century back, continually employing men possessed of a competent share of knowledge among these, our domestic Indians, with the strictest orders, enforced by proper encouragements, to instruct them carefully in the great truths of our holy religion, and to give the younger sort some tolerable notion of the *English* tongue. — Sollicitous to know whether the persons so employed have been diligent or useful, the Honourable and Reverend Gentlemen, who compose that respectable body, found it necessary to send some of the Highland Clergy upon a mission to the place; and as I was at that time settled in a parish, which is the only part of the world that maintains any kind of intercourse with

St. Kil-

## INTRODUCTION. iii

*St. Kilda*, their commission fell to my share. — To catechize the natives with a conscientious exactness, to preach among them as oft as I could without a manifest inconvenience, and to see into the state of the charity-school there, were my principal instructions: Another was, to collect all the observations I could make that might in any degree be thought worthy of being communicated to the Public.

How far I have executed the religious design of my commission, has already been communicated to the Society. — Willing to obey their commands to the utmost of my ability, I have, from the materials which fell in my way, drawn out what is contained in the following sheets. The only thing I dare venture to promise in their favour is, that the world may securely depend on the fidelity and exactness of the relation, as far as the facts are supported by my testimony.

INTRODUCTION.

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thine. — To examine the various with  
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titled inconvenience, and to determine the  
state of the church of the same, were not  
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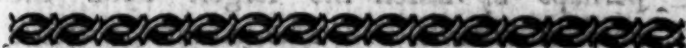




# HISTORY

OF

St. KILDA.



## CHAP. I.

*A Voyage to St. Kilda.—Occurrences.*

ON the 6th day of June 1758, I loosed from *Harris*, a part of that large tract of land now called the *Long-Island*, and formerly the *Western Ebuda*.—We steered our course for *Haw-Skeer*, a rock in the ocean, so its name signifies

in the *Galic* tongue, lying at the distance of seven leagues from the nearest promontory of *North-Uist*, to which it belongs. — As the day was quite sultry, and *Haru-Skeer* the only resting-place in our way, and extremely romantic, the crew found it convenient to rest a little and divert themselves there.

This rock is half a mile in circumference, accessible in a single place only, and though almost totally destitute of grass, is of some consequence to the proprietor, being at stated periods the constant haunt of a prodigious number of Seals, and these perhaps by much the largest upon the coast of *Scotland*. — The manner in which these sea-animals are hunted down in this place, the season fit for that profitable diversion, the ferocity and little stratagems of these unwieldy creatures when assaulted, their love-dalliances upon other occasions, that violent spirit of jealousy with which they are actuated, if provoked by rivals; these, and some other particulars, are circumstantially enough related by *Martin* in his description of the *Western Isles*. — To his account of the matter I shall only add,

add, that the fat of the Seals, is by the people, to whose share that perquisite falls, converted now into oil and sent to market.—But in that writer's time, and for ages immemorial before, this, together with the flesh of these animals, was eaten, either fresh or salted; and by these who were used to it, was accounted a pleasant as well as a very salubrious and rich kind of aliment.

On the west side of the rock, are two remarkably large caves, of a considerable height: To these a vast multitude of sea-cormorants retire every evening. Here likewise they lay their eggs and foster their young. — The method practised by the islanders for catching fowls of this kind, while secured within such fastnesses, is far from being incurious, though abundantly simple; nor is the pastime at all disagreeable. — A band of young fellows make a party, and after having provided themselves with a quantity of straw or heath, creep with great caution to the mouth of the cave which affords the game, armed with poles light enough to be easily wielded: This done, they set fire to the

combustible stuff, and raise an universal shout; the cormorants, alarmed by the outcry, frightened by a glare so strange, and offended by the sinoak, quit their beds and nests with the greatest precipitation, and fly directly towards the light: Here the sportsmen, if alert enough, will knock down a considerable number of them, and together with the cormorants, whole coveys of pigeons.

At *Haw-Skeer* we found incredible numbers of wild-fowl eggs. — After some of my people had made a great, though unnecessary acquisition of these (unnecessarily to men destined for *St. Kilda*) we began to pursue our intended voyage, at ten o'clock at night. — The wind was at first extremely favourable, as it blew from the south-east, and was little more than a gentle gale. — It began to freshen at the end of half an hour, and was gathering new strength every moment: Before we had proceeded above four leagues, the whole face of the sky was overcast with clouds; which, after the severest threatenings, bursted asunder and tumbled down upon us in violent torrents of rain, accompanied

accompanied with flashes of lightening and peals of thunder extremely terrible. All this was succeeded by a hurricane which would have alarmed the most insensible, and did greatly confound the stoutest seaman among us, men who had imagined they had seen these same mighty waters in all their horrors. To me it was matter of astonishment that a vessel so small and frail, a six-oared highland-boat, could have struggled for any time against such enormous billows, without either being overset or dashed to pieces.

The first glimpse of hope my crew had, was from a great flight of sea-fowls, of the diving kind, which was soon succeeded by another, and after short intervals by many more, in still greater numbers.— They concluded, from this circumstance, that the hour of their deliverance was at hand; but we found that our hopes were too sanguine and premature\*, for the storm continued to rage for about six hours, before

B 5

fore

\* *Virgil* ranks this circumstance among inauspicious prognostics, and experience has convinced,



fore we had the almost despaired of happiness of spying a rock, which lies at the distance of a mile from the bay of *St. Kilda*. The current round about this rock is exceedingly impetuous, and so its name *Livinish* implies, *Lbibh* in the old *British* language signifying a stream or torrent. — Whether all the waters we have in *Scotland* under the name of *Leven*, a name compounded out of *Lbibh*, a current, and *Avon*, a river, run with a violent course, I cannot positively affirm, but strongly suspect it.

In a little after we had doubled the point of *Livinish*, I discovered a strangely formed wall of dreary rocks, which face a part of *St. Kilda*. These rocks appearing thro' the medium of a very thick fog, rose to our view, to a stupendous height, though quite  
vined me, that this observation, and all the rest he has made on the subject of the weather, are perfectly just.

“*Jam sibi tum a curvis male temperat unda carinis*

“*Cum medio celeres irrevolant ex aequore mergi.*” *GEORGE I. v. 360. &c.*

quite inconsiderable, we afterwards found, if compared to others on the same coast.

In a few moments more, we came close to the ordinary landing-place, which is nothing else than a solid rock, sloping gradually down to the bottom of the sea, and all over-grown with *Lichen Marinus*, or the plant commonly called *Laver* in England, and *Slawke* in Scotland\*.

From the great quantity of this plant which grows upon the rock, any one must conclude

\* The *St. Kildians*, like some others of a more elegant taste, are particularly fond of this sea-plant. During the incumbency of a former minister, one or more of that people scraped away the *Laver* from off the face of the rock with a shell. This high crime and misdemeanor coming to light, the community was greatly alarmed. The chief men of the state met immediately in council, and fearing that this invaluable sea-weed would be entirely extirminated, unless proper precautions should be taken, as the roots of some parts of it had in their frightened imaginations been totally destroyed by the shell, conjured the parson to excommunicate the guilty; but I did not hear that the anathema was actually pronounced.

conclude that it cannot miss to be excessive slippery. A stranger will have some difficulty in clambering over it. The natives call it the *Saddle*, and that appellation corresponds in some measure with its shape ; but this name must have been originally given to it by a foreigner, as the old *St. Kildians* could have had no conception of the thing expressed by that word, any more than they have now of the chariots used by the ancient inhabitants of *Britain* for war, or those kept by the moderns for pleasure.

As the wind blew with all its fury into the bay, and as the waves dashed themselves with excessive violence against the rock, just now described, it was impossible to attempt a landing.—Reduced to almost the last extremity, we dropped anchor before the *Saddle*, and made a shift to stand there for five hours more in a most distressful condition, drenched all over, shivering with cold, and under the dreadful apprehension of being swallowed up every moment.

The machine constantly made use of instead of the anchor, by those who make annual

annual voyages to *St. Kilda*, is a large hamper made of strong wicker, and nearly filled up with stones.—The foulness of the ground is the argument they bring to justify a practice so uncommon. How far they may be in the right, sea-faring men are best able to determine.—One thing I am sure of, that we made use of our anchor without suffering the least inconvenience; though the surf rose to such a height that ten fathoms of our cable were alternately buried in the sea, or perfectly visible. The truth is, the ancestors of those men who carry on a sort of commerce with this island, had recourse to the simple expedient of the hamper, before navigation had made any tolerable progress in their country, and for that reason their posterity seem to retain the same custom\*.

The

\* It is certain that the first anchors were made of stone, or wood loaded with lead.—We are told by *Diodorus Siculus*, that the *Phœnicians* in their first voyage into *Spain*, having accumulated more silver than their ships could carry, took the lead from their anchors and put silver in its place.—The inhabitants of

*St. Kilda* have retained this custom.

The people of *St. Kilda*, upon the first notice they had of our arrival on their coast, flew down from the village to our assistance, men, women and children.—From their behaviour upon the rock, to which we lay pretty close, it evidently appeared that they have humanity enough to feel deeply for fellow-creatures in distress.—It was impossible for us to understand the meaning of their cries; only we had reason to believe that they were greatly affected by our danger.—From the repeated signals they made, we concluded at last, that in their opinion, we might safely weigh.—Trusting to their superior skill, and our patience being quite exhausted, we took the hint without loss of time. But after approaching the *Saddle*, in spite of our united efforts, we were soon

*Iceland* use a large stone with a hole in the middle, with a piece of timber thrust through it.—In *China*, *Japan* and *Siam*, they have only wooden anchors, to which they tie great stones.—The ignorance of the first ages, and the obstinate attachment of men to the customs of their forefathers, by them held in the greatest veneration, are undoubtedly the occasion of such imperfect contrivances.



soon reduced to the disagreeable necessity of sheering off.

A little to the west of this rock, there is a sandy beach, accessible only at low water. — Here is a sort of landing-place, though extremely dangerous, and for that reason seldom attempted, unless the weather be very favourable. — To this beach the people ran in a body, after having directed us to the same place. — We obeyed willingly, and they, with an amazing intrepidity, flew into the water to meet us; a most desperate adventure, in which any other race of men would hardly think of engaging, were they to see their nearest relations in the same danger. The disposition they made was this: After having divided and formed themselves into two lines, the two ablest men among them marched forward into the sea, each in the front of his own little corps. — Those next in strength and stature, seized these two leaders by the middle, and the rest, from one end of each row to the other, clung fast to those immediately before them, wading forward till those who were foremost in the rank, and after them every

every one else in the order in which he stood, got hold of the boat.—Those who go from year to year to *St. Kilda*, always take the precaution to wrap a strong rope round the stern of their boat, and tie another to the prow. As soon as the *St. Kildians* have posted themselves round it, they immediately hand about the two ropes from one to another, till the women and children who stand upon the beach come at it, so as to have their share of the work.—This operation which is so very necessary, being soon over, a general signal is given, and every individual exerts himself with all his strength and spirit: The consequence is, the boat and every thing contained in it are, with surprising quickness and dexterity, hauled on beyond the reach of the sea.

All the strength of this art was with the greatest alacrity tried upon this occasion, and with a success beyond any thing I could have expected.—Without giving time to any one of us to jump out into the water, the *St. Kildians* hoisted up, almost in a moment, our little vessel, ourselves; and all the luggage that belonged to us, to a dry part of the strand.

In

In *St. Kilda*, the miserable may find relief as well as elsewhere. We were received there by a very hospitable race of barbarians (if any one incline to call them so) with the heartiest congratulations, the sincerest professions of friendship, and the strongest demonstrations of a profound respect.

It is thought perhaps by many that those who inhabit that division of the *Western Highlands*, are much the rudest, the most brutal and merciless, and in one word, the most savage-like men within the kingdom of *Great Britain*. Whether that opinion be strictly just or not, is submitted to those, and to those only, who have sense and virtue enough to divest themselves of popular or early prejudices. One thing I may venture to affirm without committing the smallest trespass against truth, that those seafaring people, who have the misfortune to be shipwrecked about the *Western Islands*, or are reduced to extreme distress there, are treated with much greater humanity and Christian benevolence, than many of their fellow-sufferers, whose harder fate drives them to the

the more barbarous shores of some other divisions of *Scotland*, and even of *England*.

—It is certain that these unhappy persons would meet with stronger marks of true politeness, or, what is infinitely more valuable, of real compassion and generosity at *St. Kilda*, than in the more civilized places I now allude to.

If we consider the small space of time, which intervened between the end and beginning of our distress, without taking the agonies which affected us so severely into the account, the duration of our misery was far from being very long; but our fears, which settled at last in a total despondency, lengthened out every minute to a degree inconceivable to those who are strangers to perils of this kind. But indeed experience, if examined with care, will convince every man that if the train of ideas which succeed one another be greatly accelerated or retarded by any cause, external or internal, time, though constantly running forward with the same equal pace, must be proportionably shorter or longer, with regard to the person in whose mind these ideas are formed. It is certain,

certain, that if one be totally swallowed up in a pleasing contemplation of long continuance, he is scarce able to perceive the distance that lies, or that succession of moments that intervened, between the first and the last thought, sensation, or reflection, which passed through his mind upon that occasion.

On the other hand, it is equally certain, that the great rapidity of the many different and inconsistent ideas which are conceived in the mind, when our bodies are racked with acute pains, or our hearts overwhelmed with any tormenting affection, especially as men have more than an ordinary sensibility in such conjunctures, will greatly increase or prolong every moment of our time, beyond its natural length. Natural, according to our ordinary way of measuring that part of our duration.

CHAP.



## CHAP. II.

*A description of St. Kilda.*

ALL the territories belonging to the Commonwealth of *St. Kilda*, are no more than three small islands, and five naked rocks. — The principal island, together with the rest, lies in the ocean, of old called the *Deucaledonian*: Its latitude I take to be about 58 degrees and 30 minutes. If the ordinary computation be just, it is at the distance of eighteen leagues from *North-Uist*, to which it once belonged, and at that of twenty from *Harris*, of which it is now in some manner a pendicle. — The length of the whole island is at least three *English* miles, from east to west; and its breadth from south to north, not less than two. — Its whole circumference is faced with an inaccessible barrier of rocks, two places only excepted; one to the north-west, of which afterwards, and the other to the south-east.

Here

Here is a large bay formed by two promontories, the first running out to the north-east side of the island, and the other to the south-end: The former extends no great way, but the latter occupies a considerable tract of ground; and from its southern extremity describing a sort of curve, insinuates itself gradually into the land, till it comes to the north, where the bay terminates.

This bay is so open on the one side, and on the other so much exposed to squally gales of wind, which from the tops of hills and rocks, immensely high, rush down through a deep and hollow vale, with vast impetuosity, that it must be, in my opinion, an unsafe road for vessels of any burden, before the latter end of *April*, and after the middle of *August*. — I am assured the ground affords very good anchorage: The experiment has been lately made and repeated with all the success that could be desired.

The hand of Nature has divided *St. Kilda* into four distinct parts. These are separated from one another by five hills, which are  
to

to the sea-side faced with frightful precipices ; the smallest of which would deeply engage the attention of a spectator any where else. — The three that lie towards the south and west carry names, which, like those of almost every place in the Highlands, very justly express their situation, or the appearance they make to the eye. — That at the greatest distance from these is called *Ostrivaill*, a compound word, partly *Gothic* and partly *Gallic* ; which signifies the Eastern mount. But the fifth, which rises gradually from the head of the bay, is, without the smallest exaggeration, a real prodigy in its kind, and may perhaps not unjustly be stiled the *Teneriffe of Britain* : The name of it is *Conagra*,

The top of this enormous mass of matter commands a very extensive prospect. — In a clear day, if the weather be settled, all the *Long Island*, that is to say, a tract of land and sea, more than a hundred and forty miles in length, may be seen from it. — But the most striking circumstance about this great and wonderful object, is the figure it makes on the north-side : there it hangs over the deep in a  
 of most

most frightful manner. A view of it from the sea fills a man with astonishment, and a look over it from above strikes him with horror.—Most of the crew were so terrified that they would not venture to gratify their curiosity in this respect, till the natives took hold of their heels as they lay flat to look over it; yet a *St. Kildian* will stand or sit on the very brink of this stupendous precipice, with the most careless indifference. — I made a shift to take its height with some degree of exactness, and found it no less than nine hundred fathoms.—Had I never seen this immense mass, I should very probably dispute the credibility of the account now given, just as much as any one else may do, after perusing this account.

The hills of *St. Kilda* are, near their tops, mostly naked, being either covered with loose mouldering stones, or poorly clad with some small scattered tufts of a short kind of heath.—From the appearance they now make or formerly made, one of them is called *Ruair-mbail*, or the Red-hill, and the other *Mulach-geall*, or the White-summit.

It

It is far from being matter of wonder, that the tops of high mountains, and more especially in the Highlands of Scotland, should be destitute of grass. Great tempests of wind and rain, to say nothing of thunder and earthquakes, must very naturally, in a course of ages, carry away immense quantities of earth from them, and the accession of new matter which they receive cannot be very considerable. — The lower grounds, at the foot of the mountains, will be rising up from year to year, and in fact we see that these too undergo very remarkable changes.

In the turf-pits dug there, a prodigious number of trees, almost entire, are frequently found, which must have been buried in these places, after having been killed or plucked away from their roots, by the vast quantities of earth which had been washed away from off the faces of the hills above. This, and other accidental circumstances, considered, it is possible enough that many of those mountains in different places, which now make so dreary an appearance, may have been once some of the most beautiful objects in the countries



tries where they stand; that is, rich in grass, and clad with a variety of trees.—Certain it is, that men who have attained to a great age, have in this, and many other countries, seen extraordinary changes wrought on some hills, and on the grounds adjoining to them.

The ground of *St. Kilda*, like much the greatest part of that over all the *Highlands*, is much better calculated for pasture than tillage.—Restrained by idleness, a fault or vice much more pardonable here than in any other part of *Great Britain*, or discouraged by the form of government under which they live, the people of this island study to rear up sheep, and to kill wild-fowl, much more than to engage deeply in the more toilsome business of husbandry.

Their arable land hardly exceeds eighty acres; though to these might be added a great many more, were industry to be rewarded, and the spirit of it raised there.—All the lands already cultivated lie very compactly together within the precincts of the village in which the whole community dwells.

In the lower grounds are many excellent plots of grass, which though generally short, is very close. That in the valley on the north-west side of the island is peculiarly fine. This delightful valley is called, from an *Amazon* very famous in the traditions of the island, and whose house, or dairy of stone, is still extant, the *Female Warrior's Glen*. A rivulet runs through the middle of it, and discharges itself into the sea, near the small creek they call *Camper*, or the crooked landing-place, where the people make a shift to put in, if under an unavoidable necessity of making so desperate an experiment, or if the sea be quite smooth. — Above this winding sort of creek, in the delightful valley just now mentioned, are some choice spots of ground, where one may see intermixed, with the more common kinds of grass, a great and beautiful variety of the richest plants, clover, white and red; daisies, crowfoot, dandelion, and plantains of every sort. As some things are peculiar to almost every place, as well as climate, it is probable there may be plants in this, every way strange, land, which are not the growth of any other soil.

Near

Near the *Camper* is a remarkable beautiful spot, covered all over with a most exquisitely fine kind of *Sorrel*. It is by far the most delicious I ever tasted; having a most agreeable sort of poignancy, tempered with mildness enough to correct its acrimony. There is a species of wild-fowl upon the island, which are extremely fond of it. (Of these we shall speak in a more proper place.) I suppose the excrement of this fowl contributes much to the fertility of this spot, and to the same cause the sorrel probably owes its superior good quality.

The cattle of *St. Kilda* feed most luxuriously during the summer season, on the plots of grass now described; and here they yield, it may be naturally expected, more than ordinary quantities of milk. I had occasion to know the quality of it. The cream it gives is so luscious, or rather so strong, that some of my people sickened upon drinking it.

It has been observed already that all the ground hitherto cultivated in *St. Kilda* lies round the village. The soil is thin,

full of gravel, and of consequence very sharp. — Originally it was covered and lined with a vast number of stones, which have been all cleared away by the inhabitants in some former period. All the arable land is divided out into a great many unequal plots, and every one of these is in a manner inclosed and kept invariably within the same bounds, by the help of the stones just now mentioned: These serve for boundaries, and are not to be removed or any how violated, any more than those were by the ancient *Romans*, which their ancestors had dedicated to their God, *Terminus*: Hence it is, that a *St. Kildian* will find it impossible, however avaricious or cunning he may be, to hurt his neighbour, by encroaching on his farm in this way: And as the several plots, tho' very numerous, have every one of them, the smallest as well as the largest, a distinction by which it is discriminated from all the rest; the whole body of the people may in a stormy day assemble together in one place, and without any difficulty divide all their ground at a fire-side, without perambulating or taking a survey of it; and this in fact they frequently do.

The

The names of the several divisions into which the land has been parcelled out, have been transmitted from one generation to another. These sound very strangely, and are not, it is plain, originally *Gallic*. — For this reason, there is not any one among the *St. Kildians*, who will pretend to explain the meaning of them: But one may easily discover the traces of an *English* and *Latin* origin, in many of their vocables, in spite of all the changes they must have undergone in a course of ages, while passing through the mouths of a people totally illiterate, and of very indelicate ears.

I shall have occasion to show in the sequel of this little history, that several Ecclesiastics, and some Laymen too, from a foreign land, must have visited this island in some distant periods. These men must have been undoubtedly accounted able Statesmen, and profound Scholars, by the poor ignorant people of *St. Kilda*. It is extremely probable that one or more of these men may have usurped a kind of *Tribunitian power*, or may have exercised it in a legal way, that is, with the full



and unanimous consent of the community; and we have reason to believe, that this *Lay-Tribune* or *Ecclesiastical Demagogue* would have framed a body of *Agrarian* laws for the use of this little state: and though it is hard to determine, whether these Legislators were Priests or Laics, though it is more likely they were of the former order; it is plain they had craft or vanity enough, to give mysteriously learned names to every distinct portion of the ground, which their superior knowledge, or public character, gave them a right to divide and to distinguish with what appellations they pleased. But a long series of ages, the incorrect ear of an ignorant people, and that vicious manner of pronouncing words, to which the *St. Kildians* are incorrigibly addicted, must have adulterated or greatly spoiled the original names which were given to most, if not all, the arable plots. — Among the best of these are the divisions called *Multum agria*, *Multum taurus*, *Multum fovere*, or *Multum fodere*, *Queen o Scot*, *Land dotteros*, or the *Doctor's ground*, *Lan-vhalin*, or *Paul's division*. — It is evident these appellations were invented by men who knew somewhat of the *Latin* and *English* tongues.

The

The soil around the village, though naturally poor, is rendered extremely fertile, by the singular industry of very judicious husbandmen: These prepare and manure every inch of their ground, so as to convert it into a kind of garden.—All the instruments of agriculture they use, or indeed require, according to their system, are a spade, a mall, and a rake or harrow. — After turning up the ground with the spade, they rake or harrow it very carefully, removing every small stone, every noxious root or growing weed that falls in their way, and pound down every stiff clod into dust\*. — As soon as this operation is over, they sow their little fields, strewing them over with a valuable kind of manure, of which afterwards. — I say with this choice sort of manure, if

C 4

they

\* *Virgil* gave his approbation of this part of the *St. Kilda* system of husbandry, about eighteen hundred years ago, and plighted his word that it will be always crowned with success.

“ Multum adeo rastris glebas qui frangit inerto

“ Vimineasque trahit crates juvat arva, neque illum

“ Flaxa Ceres alta nequicquam aspectat Olympo.

they intend to raise a crop of barley ; and with that of the ordinary kind, if a crop of oats. This done, they harrow them over again, and leave them in the hands of *Providence*, to speak in their own stile, with a settled persuasion that their honest industry will be amply rewarded, unless God shall curse the land for the punishment of their sins.

It is certain that a small number of acres well prepared in *St. Kilda*, in this manner, will yield more profit to the husbandman, than a much greater number, when roughly handled in a hurry, as is the case in the other western isles\*. The  
people

\* The Consuls and Dictators of *old Rome* had no more than a few acres to their share : But as the land in which they lived was fruitful and judiciously divided into little parcels ; little, according to our estimation of farms, tho' large enough to support industrious families ; it maintained, though no more than a small part of *Italy*, a more numerous people than all that country, under its present management, is now able to bear. It is impossible to account, in a rational way, for those vast multitudes  
which

people of *St. Kilda* sow and reap very early, I mean, earlier than any of their neighbours on the western coast of *Scotland*.—The soil, I have already remarked, is naturally sharp and not spongy.—The heat of the sun, reflected from the hills and rocks into a low valley facing the south-east, must, in the summer-time, be quite intense, and however rainy the climate is, the corn must, for these reasons, grow very fast and ripen early.—I saw the barley of this island about the beginning of *June*, and observed that it was higher in the stalk than any I had ever seen elsewhere at that season.

C 5

The

which the land of *Canaan* once supported, without the help of commerce, a land rugged enough and of no great extent; unless we resolve the matter into the same natural causes of small farms and great industry.—When a people happen to be addicted to commerce, and are under the necessity of maintaining standing armies, it may then be justly questioned, whether in that situation of affairs, the ground fit for tillage should be frittered away into such little divisions.

The harvest is commonly over in this place before the beginning of *September*; and should it fall out otherwise, the whole crop will be almost destroyed by the equinoctial storms.—All the islanders on the western coast have great reason to dread the fury of autumnal tempests: These, together with the excessive quantities of rain they have, generally, throughout seven or eight months of the year, are undoubtedly the most disadvantageous and unhappy circumstances of their lives. The *St. Kildians* have more than an equal portion of this fore evil\*.

Barley

\* Any person who lives for a course of years either in *St. Kilda*, or in the island near it, will be sensible that there is not any thing poetically hyperbolical in the description which *Virgil* gives of what he had probably seen in the *Highlands of Italy*, near the *Alps* or *Appennine-hills*.

“ Sæpe ego, cum flavis messorem induceret arvis

“ Agricola, et fragili jam stringeret hordea culmo,

“ Omnia ventorum concurrere proelia vidi:

“ Quæ gravidam late segetem ab radicibus imis

“ Sublime



Barley and oats are the only sorts of grain known at *St. Kilda*, nor does it seem calculated for any other.— Fifty bolls of the former, old *Highland* measure, are every year brought from there to *Harris*, and all the western islands hardly produce any thing so good of the kind. — Potatoes have been introduced among that people only of late, and hitherto they have raised but small quantities of them.

The only appearance of a garden in this whole land, so the natives call their principal island in their own language, is no more than a very inconsiderable piece of ground, which is inclosed, and planted with some cabbages. — It has been observed, that garden stuffs were in much greater esteem among the lower ranks of people in the western islands some years back than they are at present, now that potatoes are universally cultivated, and with such extraordinary success. The reason is obvious; and the same reason will very probably

“ Sublime expulsum eruerent : ita turbine nigro  
 “ Ferret hiems culmumque levem stipulasque  
 volantis.”

GEORG. I. v. 316.

probably divert the *St. Kildians* from attempting any improvement in the gardening way.

The ground on the north-west part of the island is incomparably better in some parts of it, than that round the village.—The steward, or in other words, the person to whom the proprietor gives the management of the place, prevailed with some of the people, a few years ago, to make an experiment on two or three small spots there, by turning and sowing them; but so rank were the blades, and so weak the stalks, that the whole was laid before the ears were perfectly formed.—From this unsuccessful experiment they draw an argument irresistibly strong: They would have it thought so, against all future trials of the same kind. But their real and great objection against all improvements in this way, is the terrible inconvenience of wanting the finest part of their grass; which they are sensible enough would be, in some measure lost to them, were this rich ground once tilled.—It is true, their cattle are much more beneficial to the steward than to them; as he has an old prescription-right

right to all the milk they yield, from the beginning of *May* till after *Michaelmas*; but still they are of some considerable advantage to themselves; as their wives and daughters are employed (like those who were made hewers of wood and drawers of water, by their masters in the land of *Canaan*, for a crime of which the *St. Kildians* were never guilty) in milking these cattle, in which the owners are most interested only when less useful.

Another mighty discouragement is, that the steward will always have it in his power to monopolize the whole trade of this island, if one may so speak; or, in other words, to ingross every thing it produces, excepting what is necessary to keep the people alive; or to render them fit for the labouring, rather for another than for themselves; Nor is it an easy matter to redress this grievance. So peculiarly unhappy is the place in its situation, that the inhabitants must, I am afraid, to the end of time, be wholly at the mercy of some one person, who may swallow all the small commodities this island can afford; and rule the whole community with  
a rod

a rod of iron, unless restrained by honour, conscience, or an uncommon share of humanity.

This being a true state of their case, to raise up larger quantities of corn than their land now produces, or what will be necessary to support them, would contribute very little to the happiness of the *St. Kildians*.

CHAP.

## C H A P. III.

*Of the St. Kilda Houses. — Of the Staller's House, and a Druidical Place of Worship in the island of Boreray.*

ON the east side of the island, at the distance of a quarter of a mile from the bay, lies the village, more than once mentioned already.—Here the whole body of this little people live together, like the inhabitants of a town or city. All their houses are built in two rows, abundantly regular and facing one another, with a tolerable causeway in the middle, which they call the *Street*.

These habitations are made and contrived in a very uncommon manner. Every one of them is flat in the roof, or nearly so, much like the houses of some oriental nations.—That from any one of these the *St Kildians* have borrowed their manner of building, no man of sense will entertain a suspicion. They have been taught



taught this lesson by their own reason, improved by experience.

The place in which their lot has fallen is peculiarly subject to violent squalls and furious hurricanes: Were their houses raised higher than at present, they believe the first winter storm would bring them down about their ears.—For this reason the precaution they take in giving roofs much flatter than ordinary, to them, seems to be not altogether unnecessary.

The walls of these habitations are made of a rough, gritty kind of stones, huddled up together in haste, without either lime or mortar, from eight to nine foot high.

In the heart of the walls are the beds, which are overlaid with flags, and large enough to contain three persons. In the side of every bed is an opening, by way of door, which is much too narrow and low to answer that purpose.

All their dwelling-houses are divided into two apartments by partition-walls. In the division next door, which is much the largest,

largest, they have their cattle stalled during the whole winter season; the other serves for kitchen, hall and bed-room.

It will be readily expected that a race of men and women, bred in *St. Kilda*, must be a very slovenly generation, and every way inelegant.—I confess it is impossible to defend them from this imputation.—Their method of preparing a sort of manure, to them indeed of vast use, proves that they are very indelicate.

After having burnt a considerable quantity of dried turf, they spread the ashes with the nicest care over the floor of that apartment, in which they eat and sleep. These ashes, so exactly laid out, they cover with a rich friable sort of earth: Over this bed of earth they scatter a proportionable heap of that dust into which peats are apt to crumble away: This done, they water, tread and beat the whole compost into a hard floor, on which they immediately make new fires very large, and never extinguished till they have a sufficient stock of new ashes on hand. The same operations are repeated with a never failing

ing punctuality till they are just ready to sow their barley ; by that time the walls of their houses are sunk down from eight or nine foot to about four or five.

To have room enough for accumulating heaps of this compost one above another, the ancient *St. Kildians* had ingenuity enough to contrive their beds within the linings of their walls, and it was for the same reason they took care to raise these walls to an height far from being common in the other western islands.

The manure produced in this way must undoubtedly be good, though probably rather sharp than of long duration, as it is scattered in small quantities upon the surface of the ground ; so that the fiery and saline particles of it must soon evaporate. — Be that as it will, those who practise this art are abundantly lavish in its praises.—They call it a commodity inestimably precious ; and one may venture to affirm, that a genuine *St. Kildian* would scruple to barter it away for all the diamonds in *Brazil* and *Golconda*.

It

It is certain that cleanliness must contribute greatly to health, and, of course, longævity; but in spite of that instance of indelicacy now given, and many more which might have been added, I have not been able to find that the people of this island are more short lived than other men.

—Their total want of these articles of luxury, which have so natural a tendency to destroy the constitution of the human body, and their moderate exercises; will, together with some other circumstances, keep the ballance of life equal enough between them and those who are absolute strangers to sloveliness.

Besides the dwelling-houses already described, there are a prodigious number of little cells, dispersed over all the island: which consist entirely of stones, without any the smallest help of timber. These cells are from twelve to eighteen feet in length, and a little more than seven in height.—Their breadth at the foundation is nearly equal to the height.—Every stone hangs above that immediately below, not perpendicularly, but inclines foreward, so as to be near the opposite side of the Grottoe;

toe; and thus, by imperceptible degrees, till the two highest courses are near enough to be covered by a single flag at the top.—To hinder the rain from falling down between the interstices above; the upper part of the building is overlaid with turf, which looks like a fine green sward, while new.

The inhabitants secure their peats, eggs and wild-fowl, within these small repositories: Every *St. Kildian* has his share of them, in proportion to the extent of land he possesses, or the rent he pays to the steward.—From the construction of these cells, and the toil they must have cost before they could have been finished, it seems plain that those who put them together, were, if not more ingenious than their neighbours in the adjacent islands, at least more industrious than their own successors.

On the Peninsula, which terminates the larger bay on the south side, and which, at high water, is surrounded by the sea, and in every respect an island; is situated an old ruinous fort, called by the natives *Dun-fir-Bholg*.

The



The stones, of which this strange fabric was constructed, are large, nearly square, and must, of consequence, have been wrought out of a quarry; there being none of the same colour or substance to be found in the island, above ground.—It is plain that those who laid them together, understood the rules of masonry much better than the *St. Kildians* of this age, and they must have been undoubtedly men of greater power.

The antiquaries, with whom *Martin* had occasion to converse in some of the western islands, were fanciful or learnedly ignorant enough to tell him, that this fort was built by the *Volsi*.—Could these men have meant the *Volsi* of *Italy*, or the *Volsæ* of *Gaul*? Had these same antiquaries assured him that *Camilla*, at the head of her *Italian Volsians*, was employed in building this *St. Kildian* edifice, that *Turnus*, whose faithful ally this heroine was, in the last period of her life, had engaged some of his *Rutulians* in the same hopeful adventure, and that the *Volsæ* from near the *Pyrenean* mountains, in conjunction with some *Russians* from the banks of the *Volga*, had lent their

their kind assistance; any one of these conceits would have been not more ridiculous than the first, as the similarity of the name is much the same in all these instances.

Some *Irish* historians, after having obliged the world with a circumstantial account of two illustrious worthies, *Partholanus* and *Nemedius*, both originally from *Scythia* near the *Tanais*, and *Paulus Meertis*, who either planted or conquered *their island*, and that very early, go on with a chronological exactness hardly to be paralleled, to give us the adventures of *Fir-Bolgs*, a new *Irish* colony, extremely ancient, tho' later than *Partholanus*, *Nemedius*, and their subjects. — The ancestors of the *Fir-Bolgs* went, it seems, from they know not where to *Greece*, under the auspicious conduct of *Simon Breac*; and the posterity of these, sorely oppressed in that land, seized upon a fleet belonging to their persecutors, sailed for *Ireland*, and performed many wonderful feats there.

It cannot be denied that the low-country *Scots*, and some of the *Highlanders* among the

the rest, have for many ages back valued themselves not a little upon their imaginary descent from the old *Hibernians*, and we may, in my apprehension, find the true reason why *St. Kilda* fort had the honour of being called *Dun-Fir-Bholg*, in that popular, though ill grounded conceit.

Another reason too has been assigned. The people of this island have a tradition that one *Macquin*, an *Irish* rover, was the first person who settled himself and a colony of his countrymen in their land. — Be that how it will, it is matter of some wonder, that reasonable men should have thought of rearing up such an expensive fabric in a place so remote, which nature had made almost impregnable in every part of it; unless we suppose that they were under apprehensions of being pursued thither and molested there.

If I were not afraid of being thought fanciful in my conjectures, I should make no difficulty of suspecting that the ancient *Hibernians* derived their name of *Fir-Bholg* from the *Celtic* words *Fir*, men; and *Bholg*, or *Bulg*, which, according to *Festus Pompeius*,

*peius*, signified among the *Gauls* a leathern budget, or a bag made of skins. The *Irish* themselves, and the *Scots* Highlanders, retain that word in their respective languages to this day.—An old *Roman*\* speaks of a contemptible gluttonous fellow, who placed all his hopes and felicity in a budget or *Bulg* of that kind; and it may be said, perhaps, without the smallest deviation from truth; that the *Hibernians* of very remote ages, had, among their little utensils or implements, scarce any thing more valuable than bags of much the same sort.—Their furniture, while at home, must have been quite inconsiderable; and when employed in military expeditions, it is certain that they and some others secured and carried their provisions in such budgets.

It is true enough, the name *Fir-Bholg* is a contumelious one, according to this etymon; but that can never be a solid objection against the propriety or justness of

\* Cum bulga cœnat, dormit, lavit; omnis  
in una  
Spes hominis bulga.—

LUCIL. Satyra 6.

of it ; as long as it must be acknowledged, that the appellations *Cymbri*, *Sacæi*, *Allemanni*, *Picti*, *Scotti*, *Brigantes*, *Pæones*, *Cyclopes*, *Bagandæ*, and many more, belonging to whole nations and mighty tribes, were originally opprobrious ; though in process of time abundantly honourable.

The greatest artificial curiosity within the territories of that little Commonwealth, is a house, built under ground, at *Bore-ray*, an island which shall be described afterwards. — Of the house and another fabric, which, in my apprehension, greatly resembles a Druidical place of worship, I shall give an account here.

At the distance of many ages back (the precise time cannot be ascertained) a bold, public-spirited, or self-interested person, whose name was *Staller*, or *the man of the rocks* ; headed an insurrection, or rebelled against the governor or steward, and at the head of a party engaged in the same disloyal conspiracy (or rather struggle for liberty) possessed himself of *Soay*, and maintained his post there for some time. — Here he built a strange kind of habitation

D

for



for himself and his accomplices. — The story is of an ancient date, but is, by this extraordinary monument, in some degree authenticated.

The house is eighteen foot high, and its top lies almost level with the earth, by which it is surrounded; below it is of a circular form, and all its parts are contrived so, that a single stone covers the top. — If this stone is removed, the house has a very sufficient vent. — In the middle of the floor is a large hearth. Round the wall is a paved seat, on which sixteen persons may conveniently sit. Here are four beds roofed with strong flags or stone lintels, every one of which is capable enough to receive four men. To each of these beds is a separate entry; the distances between these different openings resembling, in some degree, so many pillars.

The rebel (or rather friend of liberty) who made this artificial cove, had, undoubtedly, sufficient reasons good enough to justify his taste of architecture; that he must have wanted timber to build in the common way is morally certain; it is equally

equally so; that he must have been apprehensive the enemy would invade his little kingdom in the night-time: To this we must add, that he and his associates were in danger of perishing by the winter colds.—All these considerations must have induced him to bury himself and his companions in a secure place under ground, like those old *Germans* of whom *Tacitus* gives the following account. “It is the custom of these men to open up subterraneous caves, which they cover above with a great quantity of dung: Their design is to have places of retreat in winter, and repositories for their corn. These caves soften the rigour of the winter colds; and, besides, if an enemy should at any time make an irruption into their country, he plunders only the places open to view, but those which lie concealed, or are dug under ground, are not discovered, or deceive the enemy, for this very reason, that a narrow search must be made for them\*.”

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\* What prudential considerations could have induced the ancient *Germans* to load their dens above

The stones of which this strange habitation was made, are exactly like those in *Dun-Fir-Bholg*.—That this fugitive could have procured tools to work these out of a quarry; that he and his fellow adventurers, sixteen persons only, could have finished this building in a season; that they could have supported themselves in this island without any tillage for a number of years, or that they could have defeated or resisted the superior force of an exasperated governour for a long time; all this, to me, is hardly credible.

I shall

above with great quantities of dung (*"Multa insuper fimo onerant,"* is the author's language) I cannot, for my share, comprehend, after hearing the reason assigned for that custom. I can scarce hinder myself from suspecting that the text has been corrupted; for should the reading of the text now before us stand thus (*"Multa insuper humo"*) which is no more than a slight alteration, the reasoning would be stronger, the words and ideas less offensive, and the practice of the *Germans* more agreeable to that of the *Armenians*, *Sarmatians*, *ancient Scots*, and some other nations.

I shall here venture to offer a conjecture concerning this house and the *Druidical* place of worship mentioned above; which, though not justified by the traditions of the island, may, for ought I can see, be equally probable.

What I call a *Druidical* place of worship, is a large circle of huge stones fixed perpendicularly in the ground, at equal distances from one another, with one more remarkably regular in the center, which is flat in the top, and one would think sacred in a more eminent degree.

Should one positively affirm that *Druidism* was established in this remote and almost inaccessible island, he might, I confess, with some appearance of reason, be called a hunter of chimeras, or an advocate for paradoxes.—All the temptation that could have invited priests of that institution thither, might have been, it is natural to think, very easily enumerated: But arguments drawn from secular advantages and inconveniencies, are not always conclusive in matters of this kind.—What must we think of the ancient *Brachmans*,

## HISTORY OF

and *Gymnosophists*, or the modern *Devices* and *Faquins*.—What could have tempted the men of these different professions, to renounce all commerce with the other sects, to abstain from wine, and animal food, or to deny themselves a thousand innocent gratifications.—And what shall we say of the *Anchorets* among the primitive Christians.

Ambition, as well as religion, has strange effects on the human mind, and if those principles of action happen to dwell in the same breast, they must operate very strangely.

If some Christian Ecclesiastics, influenced by superstition, avarice and enthusiasm, or some higher principle, have prevailed with themselves to fix their residence in *St. Kilda*, where is the wonder that a *Druidical* Priest, actuated by some one of these motives, might have placed himself at the head of a little spiritual empire there?

It is true there are no oak trees in the modern *Hirta*; but were it certain that no such thing ever existed there, and that  
a *Druid*



a *Druid* could not exercise his sacerdotal function without the Mistletoe, the leaves of that sacred kind of wood (a circumstance too material to have been forgotten by *Cæsar* in his account of that famous sect) yet a Priest of that denomination might carry these indispensibly necessary implements from some other place into that island.—*Pliny*, or any other author, has not informed us, that the leaves and holy fruit of that tree were insignificant or profane, unless newly plucked, or lopped away from an oak, so as to be quite fresh; besides, it is very probable that *St. Kilda* produced some wood in the days of Paganism.

To me it appears extremely probable, that the circular monument in the *St. Kilda* or *Boreray* must have been a Pagan temple or place of worship. That it could not have been intended for a seat of judicature, for the coronation of a king, for a repository of the dead, or for transmitting the memory of a battle to posterity, seems very plain; and it is hardly possible to conceive for what other use it

could have been destined, but for the service of religion.

The *Staller's* house, which lies at no great distance from it, must have been the work of time, expence, and tranquillity. — I have a strong suspicion that a *Druid* must have been the founder of it too; and that the Priests of that order (men fond of retirement) may have dwelt there. I am sensible that an objection, rather specious than unanswerable, may be started against this fancy; but if any person shall be in the humour of calling it a groundless one, he will give me leave to offer another conjecture.

It is certain that some Christian Monks have visited the *Hirta* islands, and took up their residence there. — It is equally true, that though the generality of that tribe were a lazy, useless race of mortals; not a few of them gave extraordinary proofs of ingenuity and a steady perseverance at very hard labour. — Some men of that cast and profession have hewn cells for themselves and successors out of the hardest marble quarries. — A *St. Kilda* Monk of the same  
active

active turn having a vast number of idle hours to lay out on amusements, after having gone through the more serious affairs of devotion, may have thought of building this romantic house: And as he would have found out, in a little time, that this work was a relaxation to his mind; and would, if finished, prove a very comfortable dwelling-place to himself and others; it is possible he would have spared no expence to make it habitable.—And if he wanted the assistance of any one fellow-labourer, or more, a brother Hermit, or the obsequious slaves of *Hirta*, who, doubtless, thought any service done to so holy a person, meritorious, would have very cheerfully lent their aid.

## DES. CHAP.

## CHAP. IV.

*Of the Churches, or old religious Buildings,  
and some relicts of Paganism in St. Kilda.*

WE have reason to believe that Christianity must have made some progress in our country, before the reign of *Constantine the Great*: During the heat of that general persecution under *Diocletian*, some of those who had embraced that religion, dreading the unrelenting cruelty of that blood-thirsty tyrant, must have fled from *South-Britain*, a *Roman* province at that time, and taken refuge in the *Caledonian* territories: Our historians tell us so, and nothing can be more probable.

There were some of these refugees, whom the remarkable austerity of their lives, an universal sanctity of manners, and the spirit of their doctrine, rendered so venerable, that the poor cells in which they dwelt, or lay concealed, were, in more superstitious times, esteemed holy places. Where these huts once stood, churches  
were

were built, and it was thought that these churches were highly honoured in carrying the names of the cells, together with those of the holy persons who had for some time confined themselves within these humble cottages. This is the origin of the names given now, and for many ages back, to that vast number of parochial churches and chapels in *Scotland* and *Ireland*, which have the word *Kil*, in *Galic*, *Gille*, and in the *Latin*, *Cella*, prefixed to them.

*Monkery* began in the east, and was firmly established there before it was introduced into the western provinces of the *Roman* Empire. The cruelties exercised by Pagan inquisitors, drove many of the primitive Christians into deserts, and forced them to practise extraordinary severities. This hard course of life, though at first voluntary, was soon accounted a very meritorious sort of discipline under some Christian Emperors, particularly *Constantine* and his sons, it was greatly encouraged, and at last dignified with the pompous title of *Divine Philosophy*.



If one considers the many childish fooleries and mad freaks, of which some who followed this unlucky system of philosophy were guilty, he will perhaps be surprised to find some of the greatest names of Christian antiquity striving to outvie one another in celebrating their praises: Such an useless race of fanatics may deserve some pity, but surely not the smallest degree of esteem.

We are told by two very grave authors, *Bede* and *Adamnan*, the first an *Anglo-Saxon*, the latter a *Scotsman*, and Abbot of *Iona*, that some of the divine philosophers of *Britain* wrought miracles: About a third part of *Columba's* life, which was written by *Adamnan*, is composed of these extravagant fictions. And the life of *St. Cuthbert*, with which *Bede* has favoured us in prose and verse, will furnish both the credulous and unbelieving reader with the highest entertainment of the same kind. But whether one chooses to give faith to these and such-like miracles, or otherwise, we have occasion to believe that the Monks of our island were a more rational and useful race of men than the oriental recluses,

cluses, who were guilty of the most inexcusable omission of every social virtue. — Mean time, from that humour of mortification with which the whole tribe was universally possessed, in all the different quarters of the world, as well as from a thousand passages of *Bede's* history, we cannot but conclude that not a few of the *English* and *Scottish* monks were superstitiously fond of solitary and remote places, fond of little isles, fond of keeping their bodies under a cruel mortification.

But if Providence has ever designed any man for Monkish austerities, or if any part of the globe has been destined by nature for Hermits, undoubtedly *St. Kilda* must be one of these stations. It is hardly possible for the human imagination to frame an idea of a place better calculated for all the voluntary penances of a religious self-tormentor, than this dreary and almost inaccessible isle: Here all the pernicious influence of evil company, all avocations from the great business of the spiritual life, all the flatteries of sense and time, are almost totally excluded: and it was surely most natural for a zealous *De-*  
*votee,*

votes, of a gloomy soul, upon hearing the name of so uncomfortable a place, and so much out of the way of temptation, to fall desperately fond of it, and to embrace the first opportunity of exercising his ruling passion there.

Whether the first Monk who repaired to *St. Kilda* was older than *Columba*, *Bridget*, *Patrick*, or *Palladius*, it is hard to determine; I think it is very probable that some of *Columba's* disciples were the first teachers of Christianity there. That venerable man sent one or more of his Monks to convert the *Pagan* inhabitants of the *Orkney* islands, so we are told by *Adamnan*, in that Saint's life; and what could have hindered the same holy person from extending his paternal care to the isles which lay much nearer to his favorite *Jona*, and to *St. Kilda* among the rest? One thing is certain, that a temple has been dedicated to that illustrious Abbot there, which, in the language of the place, is called *Columbcille* to this day: It lies on the west side of the village, and has neither altar, cross or cell within its precincts.

We

We are told by some *Irish* Legends, quoted by Dr. *Hammer* in his chronicle of that kingdom, that *Columba* dedicated all the churches he built, either to *Christ* or the *Trinity*: Such Legends are sufficient evidences in a matter of that kind.—*Bede's* character of *Columba* and his disciples render the account they give of these churches extremely probable. According to that author\*, these good men, as they were quite out of the world, were absolute strangers to the Synodical decrees that related to *Easter*, and practised only those things with regard to godliness and chastity which they were able to find in the writings of the Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles.

Agreeable to this observation, the largest church in *St. Kilda* was dedicated to *Christ*, and is called his temple†. It was built of stone.

\* *Bede's* Hist. Eccles. lib. 3. cap. 4.

† To some protestants it will be, perhaps, matter of wonder, that the greatest part of the churches in *Scotland*, as well as elsewhere, should have been dedicated to Saints, male and female, rather



stone, and without any cement: Its length is twenty-four feet, and its breadth fourteen. This was, in former times, the principal place of worship in the isle, and here they continue to bury their dead.

In *St. Kilda*, at the distance of a mile from the village, and to the south-west, there is a chapel, in the language of the place called *Brendan's temple*: It has an altar within, and some Monkish cells with-

rather than to Almighty God, or to the all-merciful Saviour of mankind. But these men must be entire strangers to the real genius of Popery. Whether it be true or false that the devotion paid to Saints and Angels is ultimately resolved into the glory of the Supreme Being, it is certain that where the *Romish* superstition is firmly established, and without controul, many more *Avi-Marias* are repeated than *Pater-Nosters*; or, in other words, that greater honour is paid to the creature than to the Creator, unless it can be said with justice, that we affront the Father of mercies by addressing him too oft, or that men are guilty of an unpardonable presumption, by approaching him without imploring the assistance of persons to whom neither the gospel nor our own reason advise or oblige us to have recourse.



out it. These are almost entire, and must of consequence be of later date, than the holy places dedicated to *Christ* and *Columba*.

*Brendan*, in the *Galic Brianin*, was an *Irish* Saint, and if we give credit to Legends, of which his country affords a very great store, was a person deeply versed in the liberal sciences, and a great traveller: In the course of his peregrinations, which cost him several years, he visited the western isles of *Scotland*. Before his journey thither he became the Father of *three thousand Monks*, who earned their bread with their own hands, agreeable to the fashion of these more simple ages. This vast multitude of *Brendan's* disciples lived together in *Wales*; the good man himself was contemporary with *Columba*. After having finished his travels and labours in *Britain*, he returned at last to his native country, and died Bishop of *Kerry* or *Ardseart*.

Besides the more famous purgatory, which belonged to *St. Patrick* in *Ireland*, there was another, though an ignoble one, comparatively speaking, which was called after this *Brianin*: From this circumstance we  
may

may conclude that his character must have been very high in that country. But however worthy he and others of the same credit for sanctity may have been of that glorious name, it is remarkable that in the ancient language of *North-Britain* and *Ireland*, neither *Brianin*, nor any one else of those holy men, who were much superior to him in merit, were dignified with the title of *Saint*; neither he, nor *Columba*, nor *Bridget*, nor *Patrick*, no, nor the Apostles of *Jesus*, had that very significant word prefixed to their names in that tongue, while by those who spoke the *Latin*, and the modern languages of *Europe*, this high title was, in their great wisdom, very liberally dispensed: Nay, sometimes it has been most graciously given to imaginary beings, and in great numbers too, witness *St. Ursula*, and her *eleven thousand virgins*; and what is still worse, though not more ridiculous, it has been most unjustly prostituted to the worst, or to the most foolish of men, by those who had a very strange right, *though a divine one*, to canonize whom, and to sanctify what they thought fit\*.

A great

\* Had that church which pretends to have an exclusive

A great number of churches were consecrated to *Brendan* in the western isles. In *Barra* he had a little temple, and his image was to be seen there, some little time ago, drest up in linen, and enriched with the unexpensive donatives of many pins and useless needles. The more superstitious part of the people there held him in great veneration: One of the natives, more worldly minded, it seems, than religious, took the liberty to employ his spade

exclusive right to the name, and will content herself with nothing less than *infallibility*, imposed her arbitrary commands on her obsequious votaries, to adore those Saints who have been undoubtedly translated to the regions of glory, and them only, the plausibility of the argument, or pretext with which she endeavours to justify her practice, would surely appear much more to the advantage; but most absurdly, though not unpolitically, the common mother of all Christians obliges her children to give due worship (*debitus cultus*, saith the council of *Trent* very indeterminately) or as much of adoration as they please, not only to these but to the souls of departed persons, whose characters in life were either extremely dubious, or remarkably scandalous.

spade on a little spot of ground near the Saint's temple, and on his own holiday : A neighbour reproved him severely for an act of impiety so daring. The sinner being at work in a hollow, from which he could have no view of the chapel, nor one who stood there of him, answered scoffingly, that *Brianin* could not possibly see him where he was employed. The Saint, greatly provoked by this blasphemous sarcasm, vindicated his injured honour, so tradition will have it, miraculously striking the wicked infidel blind. After so signal a judgment, the greatest unbeliever in *Barra* could hardly think of profaning a minute of the time devoted to a Saint so formidable and vengeful.

*Brendan's* festival-day was celebrated at *St. Kilda* on the twenty-seventh of *May*, the sixteenth of the same month was set apart for the same good purpose in the calendar. A blunder of the same kind has been committed by the people of this island, or by those who framed that table of sacred chronology. The day formerly observed at *St. Kilda*, in commemoration of *St. Columba*, was the sixteenth of *June*.



in the calendar it falls upon the ninth.—  
Here is a contradiction which many will  
call a matter of not the smallest import-  
ance. But those who have read the un-  
edifying history of the disputes, with re-  
gard to the exact time of celebrating the  
paschal festival, disputes which produced  
the most unchristian animosities, and a  
schism which six whole centuries were  
hardly able to cure, must be sensible that  
a controversy of this kind would have been  
once thought a most serious affair.

## CHAP.



## CHAPTER V.

*The same subject continued.*

THE *St. Kildians* are too wise or too good protestants to neglect their secular affairs on the festival days of *Columba* and *Brendan*. During the reign of Popery they paid extraordinary honours to these two Saints, and abstained religiously from the more heavy drudgeries of agriculture, taking care, at the same time, to give due attention to other important affairs.

In those Highland districts where the *Romish* superstition continue to prevail, the people of that communion, though hindered, by the laws of their church, from toiling at the plough, spade and sickle, in those holy seasons, either have or take a dispensation to employ their time usefully in twenty other branches of rural business. This lucky expedient, by which religion and the world are judiciously blended together, Christian *Rome* has, like many more

more of her institutions and customs, borrowed from her *Pagan* mother. The prince of *Latin* poets has informed us, that the swains of his country were permitted on sacred days to drain their fields, if overflowed, to fence their corn with hedges, to lay snares for birds, to burn thorns or brambles, to walk the bleating flock in the salubrious brook, and to carry oil and fruit to the market\*.

On the days devoted to the memory of *Columba* and *Brendan* at *St. Kilda*, all the milk of the Common-wealth is, with a most scrupulous exactness, delivered up into the hands of the steward or his deputy, who distributes the whole without any partiality, every man, woman and child, receiving indiscriminately an equal portion.

One

\* "Quippe etiam festis quædam exercere diebus

"Fas & juræ sinunt. Rivos deducere nulla

"Religio vetuit, segeti pretendere sæpem,

"Insidias avibus moliri, incendere vepres

"Balantumque gregem fluvio mersere salubri.

VIRG. GEORG. I. v. 268, & seq.

One can only pretend to conjecture, by whom, and at what time, this annual and now unexampled custom, has been introduced into this island. We are told by *Bede* that some of the *British* Monks had every thing in common. It is probable that those of *Jona* may have followed the same custom, in imitation of their neighbours, or perhaps in conformity to the practice of the Saints at *Jerusalem*, in the Apostolic times. It is probable, at least, that upon extraordinary or stated occasions, these good men would have followed the primitive fashion of celebrating the *Agapæ*, or love-feasts, wherein all the distinctions of high and low, rich and poor, old and young, were wholly laid aside. It is true, these love-feasts, though instituted for very good purposes, having given occasion to great abuses, not to say scandalous excesses, were at last abolished every-where: But as the people of *St. Kilda* were in no great danger of running into debaucheries, and as their teachers were, perhaps, unacquainted with the new law which abrogated the old custom, I see little reason for doubting, that some one of those honest old fashioned men would have given the sanction

sanction of his authority to a practice perfectly innocent, in a place so much out of the way of vice and all the excesses of intemperance.

I shall have occasion to show in the sequel, that *Culdees*, one or more, must have visited this island in some distant period. We are told by the learned *Sir James Dalrymple*, in his collections concerning the *Scottish* history, that those of that order had some things in common, and the rest in property\*. This he proves from an old register of the priory of *St. Andrew*. What things the *Culdees* had in common, and what otherwise, cannot be easily determined at this distance of time. But that some one of that denomination must have prescribed the rule, hitherto observed by the *St. Kildians*, with regard to their milk or annual love-feasts, is perfectly credible: and that these men had a particular regard for *Columba* and *Brendan*, appears from the honour done them in that way.

E

Besides

\* *Dalrymple's Collect.* chap. 7.



Besides the two holidays already mentioned, the people of this island observe four more, *Christmas*, the first day of the new year, *Easter* and *Michaelmas*. On the two first of these anniversaries, they eat the best things their land affords, drink very liberally, and dance with great skill and agility. On *Easter-Sunday* they are rather very grave, than like others in the humour of enjoying the gratifications of life. At *Michaelmas* the ablest horsemen among them ride their little high mettled nags, like so many *Numidians* or old *Britains*, without saddles, stirrups or bridles. Those who distinguish themselves in these races, are supremely happy in the rewards of glory and honour which they obtain, though strangers to the royal plates of the moderns, and the palm crowns of ancient times.

It was, till of late, an universal custom among the islanders, on *Michaelmas-day* to prepare, in every family, a loaf or cake of bread, enormously large, and compounded of different ingredients. This cake belonged to the Arch-angel, and had its name from him. Every one in each family,



family, whether strangers or domestics, had his portion of this kind of show-bread, and had, of course, some title to the friendship and protection of *Michael*. In *Ireland*, a sheep was killed in every family that could afford one, on the same anniversary, and it was ordained by law, that a part of it should be given to the poor. This and a great deal more was done in that kingdom, to perpetuate the memory of a signal miracle wrought there by *St. Patrick*, through the assistance of the Arch-angel, who appeared to the holy man in the shape of a dove: Undoubtedly *Michael's* aid was necessary on that great occasion. — The Saint had a young *Hibernian* Prince, the son of *Leogarius*, and a very pious queen, to raise from the dead. This was effectually done; and in commemoration of this stupendous action, *Michaelmas* was instituted a festal day of joy, plenty, and universal benevolence\*.

I have already made mention of one *St. Kilda* altar, that in *Brendan's* Chapel. There are no less than four more in the

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island,

\* *Keating's Gen. Hist. of Irel. B. II. p. 12.*

island, of which three lie at considerable distances from the holy places. There is one particularly on the top of a hill to the south-west, dedicated, according to tradition, to the God who presides over Seasons: The God of thunder, lightening, tempests and fair weather. To avert the terrible judgments inflicted by this mighty Divinity, the ancient *St. Kildians* offered propitiatory sacrifices on this altar, sacrifices of different sorts, much like the old *Pagans*, who offered a black sheep to Winter, or the Tempest, and a white one to the Spring, or propitious Zephyrs\*.

I am apt to believe that this *St. Kilda* idol was the *Taranis* of the *Celtic* nations. I am the more confirmed in this opinion, as there is an isle on the coast of *Harris*, opposite to the place where this idolatry was practised, remarkably subject to tempestuous weather, and it must have borrowed its name from this wild and formidable Deity. The isle is called *Taransy*. To derive this name from *St. Taran*, an imaginary

\* *Nigram Hyæmi pecudem, Zephyris felibus albam.*  
 VIRGIL.

ginary being, like some others of the Cælestial Hierarchy, is, in my apprehension, one of those chimæras which every ingenious man will sometimes create to himself and others. Should it be asked how the *St. Kildians* became acquainted with the *Taranis* of *Paganism*, I answer, that this terrible Deity was worshiped by all the Celtic nations, and from some one of these that little people must have derived their origin. I add further, that the *Danes* and *Norwegians* were heathens for a long time after they began to infest the *Britannic* islands, and it is certain that they were possessed of all the *Ebudes* for several centuries, and consequently of *St. Kilda*.

The place where the people of this island, offered their victims to *Taranis*, is called *Mulach - geall*, that is to say, the White eminence or hill, a name of exactly the same import with *Apenninus* of *Italy*; as the *Penrith* of *South-Britain*, in the land of the ancient *Brigantes*, is the same in its meaning with *Ruaimbaill*, or Red-hill of *St. Kilda*.

The eastern nations performed their superstitious rites, on the more solemn occasions, upon the tops of mountains. Every one has read or heard of the high places, so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. The barbarous heathens of the North adopted the same custom. All these nations were ignorant enough to imagine, that their Gods would hear and see them upon these eminences much better than in the lower grounds. That they were nearer Heaven in this situation, might be said with some plausibility. The privacy and remoteness of such places was the best argument that could have been urged to justify the practice.

In the face of another hill that lies directly in the road, from the *St. Kilda* village to the valley on the north-west side, there is a very large stone, white and square, on which they formerly poured, on the Sundays, *libations of milk*, to a subordinate Divinity, whose name was *Gruagach*.—According to the belief of some weak, superstitiously inclined persons in the islands, this *Gruagach* was a good humour-ed, sportive and placable Deity. He was, likewise,

3

likewise, very moderate in his demands; a small tribute of milk, when easily spared, the milk of a single cow, in Summer or Autumn, was enough to conciliate his friendship. The name of this God signifies, in the *Galic* tongue, one with fine hair or long tresses.

The learned need not be told, that an epithet of exactly the same meaning was given by the *Greeks* and *Romans* to *Apollo*, and *Apollo* was once the cowherd of *Admetus* King of *Thessaly* or *Pheræ*: It seems plain, from an inscription dug up near *Edinburgh*, about two centuries ago, that this Deity was worshiped by the *Britons* under the title, or additional name, of *Grannus*. The Curious may see the inscription in *Cambden's Britannia*, and in the article *Gadeni*. That excellent antiquary conjectures very ingeniously, that *Grannus* is a *Celtic* word, which signifies one with remarkably good hair. To support this fancy, he quotes a passage from *Isidore*, which shows that the long hair of the *Goths* were called *Granni*. I add, that in the ancient language of this country, *Graine* conveys the very same idea: Ad-



mitting, therefore, *Cambden's* conjecture, *Grannus* and *Gruagach* are vocables of the same import; and as the two words are equivalent in sense, so it is to be remembered, that the *libations* set apart for the *Gruagach* were offered to him on the day consecrated to the sun.

A little above the sacred stone now described (and it may be observed that there was a *Gruagach* stone, in almost every village throughout the western isles) there is a little green plain, which the *St. Kildians* call *Liani-nin-ore*, that is to say the plain of *spells*, *exorcisms*, or *prayers*, *ore* being derived from the *Latin* word *oro*.—Here the old *St. Kildians* implored the blessing of their God on their cattle, and here they lustrated or sanctified these cattle with *salt*, *water* and *fire*, every time they were removed from one grazing-place to another. By the virtue of this ceremony they conjured away, so they fondly thought, the power of fascinations, the malignity of elves, and the vengeance of every evil genius.

The

The wiser and more learned nations of *Greece* and *Italy*, made use of fire, sulphur, and holy-water, for much the same purposes; and something quite analogous to the *St. Kilda* superstition, was practised every year by the *Fratres Arvales* of *Rome*, as well as by every husbandman in *Latium*. *Tibullus* is pretty full on this subject\*; and I know not whether it be quite unnecessary to add, that the same fine writer informs us likewise (*Ovid* does the same) that milk-libations were offered by the *Romans* to the Gods and Goddesses of cattle.

Below the field of *Spells* and *Lustrations* there is another beautiful spot, tolerably extensive, and in appearance fertile. The people are obstinately averse to turn it up for corn, being possessed with a strong belief, that the spot ought to be kept inviolably sacred, and that such a bold incroachment on it would be infallibly attended with the loss of their boat, or some other public calamity. They have forgotten the name of the Divinity to

E 5

whom

\* Lib. II. Eleg. 1.

whom this ground belongs ; but like the old *Athenians*, and some other nations, they are determined, at all adventures, to worship their *unknown God*.

I was at some pains to reason and ridicule them out of this absurd fancy, but to little purpose. They appealed first to the sad experience of their predecessors, and afterwards eluded my arguments, by maintaining, with a violent obstinacy, that the produce of this spot, if tilled, could never balance the expence. In short, if any one, excepting the Steward, should presume to turn this sacred plot, I am persuaded that the *St. Kildians* would, with a much more honest zeal, seek their revenge on so impious a person, than *Philip of Macedon* and his confederates did on the irreligious or greedy *Phocæans*, for their sacrilegious encroachments on the *Delpbic God* in his holy land.

## CHAP. VI.

*Of the sacred fountains of St. Kilda. Cup-dees once there. Hirta, the true name of that island.*

THE fountain-water of *St. Kilda* is, beyond comparison, the finest I ever tasted, and one will easily find inexhaustible quantities of it in every corner of that isle. In this respect the natives have a very considerable advantage over their neighbours in some parts of the *Long Island*.—Of these, many are under the hard necessity of supplying their wants with a most disagreeable sort of water, which they either draw out of standing pools, or skim away from off the surface of some little scanty springs, which are strongly impregnated with salt, and very apt to dry up in the summer season. The places where these men find it convenient to build their houses, are generally very near the coast of the western ocean, and are almost in a level with it, so that the fountains which their hills produce, are swallowed up in the:

the many lakes with which the country is overspread, or lost in deep morasses, before they come down to the sea-side.—In *St. Kilda*, the ground is otherwise contrived. The hills are excessively high, and almost perpetually covered with clouds.—It will be naturally expected, that the water which flows down from these must be clear, sweet and copious, after it is filtrated through rocks, constantly supplied from a never-failing source, and not in the smallest degree adulterated, by any thing that can render it disagreeable or noxious.

In this island are three consecrated wells, which have been held in the greatest veneration of old. Of these the most remarkable is that near the *Camper*, or crooked bay. It is, undoubtedly, a very noble fountain. They call it *Tobirnimbuaadh*, or the *Spring of diverse virtues*. During the reign of *Popery*, the *St. Kildians* paid a kind of religious adoration to it, from a very serious persuasion that the water had obtained some extraordinary benediction, and, in consequence of that, had virtue enough to perform miraculous cures. Among the lower classes of mankind, it is hardly possible to conquer,



conquer, or totally eradicate those superstitious prepossessions which have the sanction of antiquity, especially if confirmed by some lucky accidents, which seem to justify the belief of former ages. Weak and illiterate men will be ever ready to entertain prejudices of that kind with the profoundest respect. Some little time ago, a person long afflicted with a distemper, which had defeated the skill of all the people about him, took it in his head to go from *Harris* to *St. Kilda*, upon a sort of religious *Pilgrimage*. His meaning was, to lay his grievance before the patron of this fountain.

It was once a fundamental article of faith in this isle, that the water here was a sovereign cure for a great variety of distempers, deafness particularly, and every nervous disease. Near the fountain stood an altar, on which the distressed votaries laid down their oblations. Before they could touch the sacred water, with any prospect of success, it was their constant practice to address the Genius of the place with supplication and prayer. No one approached him with empty hands. But  
the

the devotees were abundantly frugal: The offerings presented by them, were the poorest acknowledgements that could be made to a superior Being, from whom they had either hopes or fears. Shells and pebbles, rags of linen or stuffs worn out, pins, needles, or rusty nails, were generally all the tribute that was paid; and sometimes, though rarely enough, copper coins of the smallest value. Very frequently the whole expence of the sacrifice was no more than some one of the little common stones that happened to be in the Pilgrim's way. In the memory of our fathers some injudicious Protestants, who retained more or less of the old leaven, made a practice of leaving such trifling donatives near the fountains on the other western isles, I mean those which were in every one of them dedicated to some one Saint, Angel or Divinity, to the *Lord*, to *Christ*, to the *Virgin Mary*, to *St. Columba*, *St. Guthbert*, &c. or *Michael*. But we have great reason to doubt, that the donations made in the days of Priest-craft and credulity, by those well meaning believers, who had recourse to such miraculous waters, were equally insignificant.

This

This part of what is called the old religion, was undoubtedly borrowed, like many more, from *the Pagan Theology*. Among the Heathens of *Italy*, and other countries, every choice fountain was consecrated, and sacrifices were offered to them, as well as to the Deities who presided over them. *Ovid* informs us\*, that the religious King *Numa* offered a sheep to a sacred spring, of which scarce any had leave to drink, excepting two rural Divinities, *Faunus* and *Picus*. *Horace*, though none of the most superstitious men, in compliance surely with the practice of the times and country in which he lived, made a solemn promise, in a beautiful little ode, which has immortalized the subject of it, that he would make a present of a very fine kid, some sweet wine, and flowers, to a noble fountain in his own *Sabine Villa*. Whether the Lyric Poet spoke seriously on this occasion, or indulged his sportive vein, it is superfluous to quote any more instances.

Some

\* Fast. Lib. III. ar. 300. Fonti Rese Numa  
maçtat ovem.

Some Christians, either over zealous, or too little acquainted with the spirit of their own religion, or perhaps more in love with the wisdom of the serpent, than with the innocence of the dove, found out the use which those of their persuasion might make of miraculous fountains, as well as the *Pagans*. *Lucinius Mucianus*, once the rival and afterwards the friend of *Vespasian*, saw, if we must believe *Pliny* the elder, a notable spring in the island of *Andros*, which furnished a very considerable quantity of wine upon certain occasions. This might indeed have happened, under the direction of some wise managers. It would have been an everlasting disgrace to our religion, that Heathens could have outdone us in working signs and wonders. Therefore, a famous enough Christian Bishop, no less a man than *St. Epiphanius*, saw another spring of the same extraordinary kind, which spouted out, though not at all times, I know not how much of the same precious liquor. But streams and whole rivers of wine are nothing at all, however desirable, if compared to bodily health; and that inestimable blessing, if given by a Saint who presides over a fountain,

fountain, should contribute more to devotion than the miracle seen by the holy father, and should, of course, turn out more to the advantage of the priests engaged in the service of so useful a Saint.

The second holy well at *St. Kilda* is below the village, and gushes out like a torrent from the face of a rock. At every full tide the sea overflows it, but how soon that ebbs away, nothing can be fresher or sweeter than the water. The natives call it *Toberi Clerich*. In the *Galic* tongue, *Clerich* signifies the same thing with *Clerk* in *English*, and both these vocables are a corruption of the word *Clericus* in Ecclesiastical *Latin*. The Highlanders sometimes express the low office of a *Bedler* by the word *Clerich*: The original reason, I suppose, was this: The Priest's servant was, in the dark ages of *Papery*, reckoned a scholar, and perhaps, next to his master, one of the profoundest in a whole land, as he was taught to repeat some little scraps of a *Latin* Missal, by way of making responses: But as the famous *Columba* was in the western Highlands and isles, called the Clerk by way of eminence, or to speak

in



in the language of that country, *Calum Clerich*, I am apt to believe that the excellent *St. Kilda* fountain, now described, had the honour of being called after that celebrated scholar and divine. Buried as it is under the sea, no less than twice in every twenty-four hours, its water is never brackish in the smallest degree. It was natural enough for the *St. Kildians* to imagine, that so extraordinary a phenomenon must have been the effect of some supernatural cause; and one of their teachers would have probably assured them, that *Columba*, the great Saint of their island, and a mighty worker of miracles, had destroyed the influence which, according to the established laws of nature, the sea should have had on that water. I had almost forgotten to observe, that the Saint, Angel or Deity, to whom the wonder-working *Tobernimbuadh* pertained, is now an unknown Being, his name having been long ago buried in oblivion.

The third sacred fountain at *St. Kilda*, is near the heart of the village, and is of universal use to the community. The water of it is sweet, light and clear like crystal. The people give it the name of *Tober Childa Chalda*.

*Martin,*

*Martin*, in his description of the western isles, informs us, that this remote place derives the name, under which it goes in the *English* language, from one *Kilder* who lived there. I wish that gentleman, as his curiosity was great, and, in my opinion, laudable enough, had found out and told his reader, what this man's character and office were, whether a Layman or Ecclesiastic, at what time he lived, and why the isle borrowed its name from him. — For my share I am not sufficiently conversant with history, civil or ecclesiastical, to find out that this same *Kilder* or *Kilda*, ever existed here or any where else; and the present inhabitants of the island are absolute strangers to this their imaginary Patron or Hero. We read indeed of a famous enough female Saint whose name was *Kilda*\*. This pious woman, in the infancy of the *Saxon* church, made a considerable figure. She founded the Abbey of *Whitley*†, wrought sundry miracles, if any old tradition deserves any credit, transformed serpents into stones, which retain their

\* *Bed. Hist. Eccles. Lib. III. cap. 24, and 25.*

† *Camb. Brit. p. 89. 906.*

their original form in some degree to this day ; by the mighty power of her prayers entailed an everlasting curse on the wild geese, that infested the fields pertaining to the monastery, a curse fatal to these sacrilegious creatures ; and what redounds more to her honour than ten thousand feats of that kind, opposed, with all her strength, the encroachments made by the *Romish* Missionaries on the liberties of the *British* Churches. But that either the name of this holy woman, or the fame of her miracles, had travelled to *St. Kilda*, is absolutely improbable, especially as we find no vestiges of the first, nor any notion of the last, in any other part of this kingdom.

*Gildas* is an old *British* writer, of whom all the learned have heard ; he seems to have been a very pious man, if peevishness and ill-nature can be reconciled with that character. That he has been dignified with the title of Saint, I am not able to recollect. We are told by some that he was born near *Dumbarton* ; but he was far from being fond of those who dwelt near that place in his time, I mean the

*Scots* ;

Scots; and had he been in a more friendly disposition, with regard to our nation, it is hardly possible to imagine, that the reformers, teachers or people of *St. Kilda*, had any connection with him, or the smallest veneration for his name.

That the ancient Clergy of this kingdom were called *Culdees*, *Colide*, *Keledei* and *Kaledei*, is plain beyond contradiction. Our historians tell us so, and some of these had no party-interest to serve in that matter. In vain has it been objected, that neither *Bede* nor *Nennius* have made any the least mention of these old Ecclesiastics. The word *Keledei* is a *Galic* vocable, and why should either of these writers speak of the old *Scottish* or *Pictish* Clergy under a *Galic* name, unless they had a mind to give some specimens of their skill in that language, which they have both done with very little success in some other instances.

The original and genuine name of the Christian teachers in *North - Britain* was *Gille-Dee*, that is to say, the servants or ministers of God, an appellation or title extremely proper; and this name has been  
hitherto

hitherto preserved in its first purity, in one of the *Argyleshire* islands, which was impropriated for one or more of that order, by the piety of these times. Another new tribe of Ecclesiastics, whose power became at last irresistibly strong, exerted all their furious zeal and wicked industry, to exterminate this more useful or innocent order of God's servants; and long before that selfish project was carried into execution, their true name or ancient title passing through the mouths of men, who were strangers to the language out of which it had been formed, was corrupted first into *Keledes*, and afterwards learnedly turned into *Colides*, or *Cultores Dei*, of which words *Culdee* is a contraction.

All that is further necessary to be observed is, that the learned *Dr. Lloyd* of *St. Asaph*, who has been at so much pains to bring this order of men into contempt, was constrained, by the power of truth, to acknowledge that we had Clergymen in *Scotland*, under the denomination of *Culdees*, after the time of *Bede* and *Nennius*.

This



This being admitted, it is surely not unreasonable to believe, that the zealous Abbots of *Iona* would have sent one or more of that order and name to *St. Kilda*, with a design of converting, or further instructing the people there; and one may very rationally suppose that a *Culdee*, monastically given, would have been irresistibly prompted, by a pious ambition, to go thither spontaneously. A person of that profession, who inclined to enjoy the benefit of a very remote hermitage, to go through a course of meritorious austerities, to indulge his melancholy humour in a sedentary life, or to promote the spiritual happiness of a most ignorant and helpless race of mortals, could not possibly think of a more desirable place. One of that dark complexion, and under the influence of such principles, would have been much admired in this island; and as he would, perhaps, have religiously piqued himself upon drinking nothing else but water, like the oriental *Anchoretes*, the fountain near which he had his cell, and which satisfied his very moderate desires, would have very probably been called after him; and as this *Culdee* must have been

been a stranger, and every stranger from the remote parts of *Britain*, especially if unacquainted with their own language, is stiled *Gaul*, or *Gauldie* by the Highlanders, the man's common designation would have been *Gille Dee Gauldie*, and the fountain, in honour of him, called *Tober Childee Chaldie*, or nearly so. I shall have occasion, in another place, to show that the *St. Kildians* have either a peculiar imperfection in their organs of speech, or have at least a most incorrect way of pronouncing, so that an infinite number of words, which belong to their own native tongue, are entirely perverted by them, or spoiled in the sound. This being the case, it is far from being matter of wonder that they should have corrupted the words *Tober Ghille Dee Ghauldie* into *Tober Childie Chauldie*, as all nations have committed a thousand grammatical faults of the same kind.

Whether this conjecture stand or fall, is a matter of not the smallest consequence. But from the name of the fountain, which gave me some encouragement to offer it, the island was, in all probability, termed *St. Kilda*, though of late only. Some one  
who

who would fain have been thought wiser or more learned than his neighbours, upon hearing the fountain, now under consideration, called *Tábir Ghilda*, concluded immediately, partly with reason and partly without any, that the person from whom it derived that appellation was a Saint, that his proper name was *Kilda*, and that the island should ever after be stiled *St. Kilda* after him, rather than carry the Gothic inharmonious name of *Hirt* any longer.

I am sensible enough, that etymological discussions are little regarded by the generality of readers, and am so likewise, that the conclusions drawn from them, though wrought off with a great expence of erudition and fancy, are oft enough rash, absurd, and full of uncertainty. The etymon of our country's name, *Britannia*, has exercised the imagination, judgment, and pens of very learned men. Of these one has derived the word from the *Phœnician* language, some from the *Latin*, a few from the *Irish*, and others from the ancient *Celtic*. All these antiquaries and critics may be mistaken, and undoubtedly

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the most of them are so. This being evidently the case, what I am to advance in two or three successive pages, may signify very little, or perhaps less than nothing; any one therefore who will condescend to peruse these sheets, and happens to have no taste for etymological conjectures, especially where *St. Kilda* is the subject, may run forward to the beginning of a new chapter, without stopping here any longer.

The true name of the island we have been describing is *Hirt*. That of *St. Kilda* is a modern one, and so far as I could discover, scarce one hundred and fifty years old. *Buchanan* calls it *Hirta*, and *Cambden*, perhaps more justly, *Hyrtba*. The earliest mention made of it in any paper now extant is, I apprehend, in a charter granted by *John*, Lord of the Isles, to his son *Reginald*, and confirmed by King *Robert* the Second, after the middle of the fourteenth century. In that charter the island, now called *St. Kilda*, goes under the name of *Hyrt*.

*Tacitus*, in his excellent little book concerning *Germany*, and the manners of its inha-

inhabitants\*, observes, that seven different nations there, and the *Angles* made one of these, worshiped one Deity in common, a Deity whose name was *Hertbus*, which he himself explains by *Terram Matrem*, in *English*, Mother Earth. The *Saxons*, or the posterity of the *Angles* before mentioned, have imported the same word, *Hertbus*, into *South Britain*, leaving out the *Latin* termination only. Every one knows that the vocable, Earth, is used in that country to express the well known idea which the *Romans* affixed to their word *Terra*. Should any one say, with *Justus Lipsius*, that *Tacitus* ought to have written *Erthum* without the aspiration; another very able critic †, I mean *Boxhornius*, will inform him that the true orthography of

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the

\* In commune *Heribum*, id est, *Terram Matrem* colunt, eamque intervenire rebus hominum, invehi populis arbitrantur.

† At *Hertam* scripserunt veteres Germani, Antiquissimæ illæ Glossæ nostræ, *Salum*, *Herda*, *Herdi*. Itaque nihil hic mutandum. *Boxhornius*.

Vide *Tacit. de Mor. Germ. cap. 40. Edit. Gronovii*.



the word, among the ancient *Germans*, was *Herta*, *Herda*, or *Herdi*.

The remains of the ten thousand *Greeks* under *Xenophon*, after having at last overcome the dangers and fatigues of the severest campaign recorded in history, upon discovering the sea from the mountains of *Paphlagonia*, cried out in a strong transport of joy, *The Sea, the Sea*; nor could any thing have been more natural. But now, should we suppose with venerable *Bede*, that a band of adventurers from *Scythia*, or what is much the same thing, from *Germany* or *Scandinavia*, had been driven about through the northern ocean for some time, and after a very hard struggle against the severest distresses, had the unexpected satisfaction to see land at last, it would have been surely no less natural for them to say, with the same tone of voice and exultation of soul, *Hert, Hert*, or *Land, Land*.

To say nothing of *Bede's* more ancient *Picts*, who had been driven about by unfavourable winds, according to the tradition which furnished him with that story, till they arrived in *Hibernia*; we know with certainty,

certainly, that *Norwegians* and *Danes* infested each side of this kingdom, for a course of ages. Some of these rovers, if driven forward by north-east winds, after having lost their course, or after having left *Schetland* behind them, would have naturally spied out *St. Kilda* sooner than any other place in the *Deucalionian* ocean, as the rock and hills there are higher than any where else, and upon making so agreeable a discovery, would have very probably cried out, *Hert, Hert*; nor is it an extravagant conceit to suppose, that this small land might for that very reason have retained the name ever after. One need not be surprised that this place should have been distinguished in the *Gothic* tongue by an appellative, instead of a proper name. The same thing has been done in other languages. *Britain* was of old called *Albion*, whether one chuse to derive that name from the *Hebrew*, *Phœnician*, *Greek* or *Latin*, and learned men have had recourse to all these languages in giving the etymon of it; or to speak in other words, whether we draw it from the whiteness of its cliffs, from the height of the grounds, or from its fertility in producing the best

grain, it is plain, that the same name might, for the very same reasons, have been given to many other regions. Every one knows the word *Water* is far from being a proper name, by which one river may be discriminated from another. But how many rivers have been distinguished of old, by an appellative of exactly the same signification. *Dur* in the *Celtic* is equivalent to the *English* word *Water*; and yet we find that a famous river in *Spain* had no other name, than that of *Durius*, as two more in the *Alpine* regions were called *Duria*. In the *British* and *Scotch* languages, *Avion* signifies a river, and *Uisk* water. For that reason, and for it only, many rivers in *England* and *Scotland* have been, in ancient times, known only under the general denominations of *Avon* and *Isle*, *Esk* or rather *Uisk*; nor have these indefinite names been entirely destroyed through time.

To this I shall add, that there is a well known promontory in *Devonshire*, called *Hert-ness*, whose name is evidently compounded out of two *Saxon* or *Danish* words,

*Hert*

*Hert* and *Nefs*, both together signifying the land's end, and both agreeing in sense with *Kintire*, the *Galic* and *British* name of a district in the western parts of Scotland.

#### F. 4. CHAP.

## CHAP. VII.

*Boreray and Soay described. An Account of the Land Animals there, and in the principal Island.*

AT the distance of two leagues from *Hirta*, and directly north from it, lies another isle called *Boreray*, which is more than an *English* mile in circumference. It is surrounded with perpendicular rocks of prodigious height, two landing places only excepted. One of these rocks is almost as high as the famous *Cognara*. I stood on the top of this pile, half giddy, and supported by two of the natives. The prospect we had before us, and the attitude in which we surveyed it, clouded my eyes with a sort of darkness.

To behold a boundless ocean in all the wildness of its grandeur, and to stand at the same time on the brink of an immense precipice, against which mountain-like billows exert their whole strength and fury,



sure, must strike any new observer with admiration, astonishment, and some kind of solicitous awe. My people had not the resolution to advance far enough to examine this amazing object. Their terror was to *St. Kildians* a very diverting scene.

Our walk from the boat to the top of the rock was far from being long, but so steep was the ascent that we found ourselves under the necessity of resting three different times.

In our return we were conducted by a decrepid, half blind creature, who, with a considerable burden on his back, strutted before us with a very solemn port, proud of his superior agility, and laughing most heartily at the awkward motions of the strangers.

It is impossible to travel here, or thro' the adjacent rocks, without putting off ones shoes; these being justly accounted great incumbrances, are left behind in the boat. The people cover their feet with sockets made of cloth, and sewed with

feathers. It is needless to explain the reason why.

All the grass in *Boreray* is excessively fine and very thick, though too short. — There is a plot of it which consists entirely of sorrel, like that in the *Campar* of *Hirta*. The whole isle supports about four hundred sheep, and these are remarkably prolific. I have said remarkably so, for this plain reason, among others, that the sheep which are worn out of their fecundity in the main island, if transported thither, will bear for a course of years. Here is a demonstration that the grass is peculiarly good, and of an impregnating quality, if I may so express it.

At *Boreray* there is a vast number of the little conical houses, for preserving eggs and wild-fowl.

But the greatest curiosities here are, the romantic building already described, I mean the *Staller's* house, and the *Druidical* place of worship.

To

To the west of *Hirta*, within a small distance, lies a third isle, called *Soay*, of much the same extent with *Boreray*, in which there are five hundred sheep. These belong to the steward, as those of the isle just now described, are the property of his vassals.

The rugged face of this island makes it very difficult to catch the sheep, either to shear, or bring them to *Hirta*. To pursue such wild creatures through declivities terminated by the deep, or into the shelves of vast rocks, is undoubtedly an adventure no less perilous than bold. The *St. Kildians* are, perhaps, the only men in the universe equal to it, and should any one fancy that their amazing intrepidity, on such occasions, must be resolved into necessity, the rage of hunger or the dread of absolute power, he must permit me to think and affirm, that the love of glory is, in many cases, the great and only spring of these desperate enterprises. In *St. Kilda*, feats of this kind are deemed heroic actions, and no less so, than to mount a breach, or to march up to the mouth of a cannon, elsewhere.

But

But if we throw the principle of honour, the influence of fame, and the rewards of bravery out of the question, I am persuaded there are thousands who would sooner encounter an armed enemy, and face all the dangers and horrors of war, than attack the very sheep of *Hirta*, in those hideous fastnesses into which they very often make their retreat.

The old rams, if chased into dangerous places, and heated into a passion, turn sometimes desperately fierce; reduced to the necessity of yielding or tumbling over a precipice into the sea, they face about, and attack the pursuers.

To the west of *Soay* is a naked rock called *Plaste*, and between *Soay* and the main island lies another, which goes under the name of *Stacki-birach*; within pistol shot of this last mentioned, lies *Stacki-don*, or the stack of no consequence, being the only rock, within the territories of *Hirta*, where the fowls do not hatch. *Plaste* and *Stacki-birach* derive their names from their respective forms; the first being

ing flatter near its top, and the latter ending in a spire.

To the west of *Bareray* are two rocks more, *Stack-in-Armin*, and *Lij*, each of them remarkable for its height, and the prodigious number of wild-fowl that haunt them. *Stack*, in the *Galic*, signifies a pyramidal rock, which rises out of the sea, and is detached from every thing else. — There is not, I apprehend, a single word in the *English* tongue that expresses this complex idea. In the same *Galic*, *armin* stands for a hero, or great man, and as this language is a dialect, or branch of the old *Celtic*, once spoken all the way from *Spain* to the *Baltic*, and further, I am tempted to believe, that *Arminius* was no more than the ordinary title, given, by way of eminence, to that illustrious hero and truly great man, who destroyed *Varus* and his legions, fought against *Germanicus*, and the best troops of the *Roman* Empire, and was, to speak with *Tacitus*\*, the deliverer of *Germany*. But whatever may be in this conjecture, tradition has

not

\* *Annal. Lib. II. cap. ultima.*



not preserved the name or adventures of the great man or hero, after whom *Stack-in-Armin* was called.

Having thus taken a survey of all the land and rocks of *St. Kilda*, I shall now proceed to speak of their land animals.

All the cows in the principal isle, and it is there only the men of *Hirta* raise cattle of that kind, hardly exceed forty, including the young ones. This scarcity of black cattle is uncommon in a place of such extent, and so productive of grass.— Of these forty cows some are the steward's property, and by virtue of an immemorial custom, all the milk yielded by those which belong to the people, fall to his share.— This cruel law, which has been in some measure abolished by the present steward, must be one reason why the stock of cattle is so inconsiderable at *Hirta*.

Another reason may be drawn from the impossibility of selling the increase of their store to any person, excepting to one whose power is absolute. This every one will readily see must be the case, unless we suppose

suppose that the hearts and understandings of all *St. Kilda* stewards are better disposed than those of other governors, bathaws, viceroys and monarchs.

While despotism reigns over that little community, industry will be effectually discouraged, and poverty must be the natural consequence of both, which, by the by, is no evil, as the necessaries of life are easily purchased by the *St. Kildians*, and any thing else is hardly of any use to them.

The present steward is far from being unmercifully inclined, and has already reformed some old abuses.

It is true, libery has scarce been tasted before his time, and its real value little understood within the small province he governs. But the people, though unacquainted with the peculiar felicity of the *British* constitution, and never unaccustomed to the yoke of slavery, are not of the same low spirit with those servile *Cappadocians* who refused the invaluable present of freedom, offered to them by the *Romans*.

The

The hard pressure of grievances they feel like other men; are ready enough to murmur in corners, and have formerly made some efforts to recover the natural right of the human species.

If one divide the *St. Kildians* into three classes, those who belong to the highest, possess seven or eight cows, the people of middle rank from four to one, and those of the lowest order none at all. Every beast of that kind in the isle is housed in the winter season, and as the place affords much more provender than these are able to consume, it is plain there would be no difficulty in rearing up many more, were the natives led by their inclination, or directed by interest so to do.

The few cows they have are very pretty, though quite small; they are generally red or speckled, and would be thought curiosities. I fancy, in some other parts of *Britain*. But there may be some reason to suspect that they cannot thrive there, as they seem to be of much the same constitution with those of the same kind, in some other small isles on the north-west coast.

coast. The cattle brought up in these, if driven to the neighbouring places, where the grass happens to be of a very different nature, are apt to contract a kind of strangury, which is in a short time succeeded by copious effusions of urine, deeply tinged with blood, a symptom which infallibly prognosticates the approaching death of every beast so affected. The grass of the isles, which produce the cattle obnoxious to this distemper, is very saltish, remarkably fine, and without any mixture of heath. It is true, there is no difficulty in finding grass with the same qualities, in the more southern parts of our country; but how to drive the cattle of the small isles, now in my eye, thither, without subjecting them to the inconveniences or danger mentioned above, is the question.

All the horses of *St. Kilda* are only ten, including foals and colts: They are of a very diminutive size, but extremely well cast, full of fire and very hardy. The small beasts of that kind, here and in some other isles, carry loads greatly beyond the conception of strangers, who would  
form

form a notion of their strength from the small size of their bodies. One may, I suppose, very reasonably attribute their extraordinary mettle to the quality of the grass on which they feed, which is abundantly substantial, though short, as it rises generally out of a sandy soil near the sea, and must, for that reason, be strongly impregnated with particles apt to inflame the blood and invigorate the spirits.

At *Hirta* it is, perhaps, unnecessary to bring up more animals of this species: The people have no sea-ware to carry from their shore, like the other islanders, and all the other manure, used by them, are carried by their wives and children without any great inconvenience, to the several plots for which it is destined, as all their arable ground lies contiguous to their houses. Their turf they bring down from the tops of the hills, which hang above the village in wicker baskets or hampers. As the isle produces not the smallest sprig of any kind of wood, and as of course they must purchase the hampers at a dear rate, the poor people are extremely tender of them, and for that reason



reason cover them with skins, and line the bottom with rags.

The *St. Kildians* owe a great part of their felicity to sheep and wild fowl. — They have considerable flocks of sheep; it is hardly possible to ascertain the precise number of them in the main isle. — The people have their own mysteries of state. In proportion to the number of sheep he possesses, every man must pay a certain heavy tax to the steward; and very few, if any, are scrupulous enough not to practise frauds, if they can. The temptation to conceal as much as they possibly can, in this way, is surely strong. According to the laws of their land, every *Hirta* householder must pay to the person he calls his master, every second he lamb, every seventh fleece, and every seventh she lamb.

At *Boreray* are about four hundred sheep, and in the mean isle are, I may venture to affirm, a thousand more; they are all of the smallest kind, and their wool is short and coarse. It is rather softer than that in the other isles, and not so well mixed.

mixed. The mutton had, I imagined, a peculiar taste, though agreeable enough. Every one of those sheep has two horns, and many of them four. They are wonderfully fruitful. One of the people assured me, that in the course of thirteen months, one sheep had encreased his flock with nine more : She had brought three lambs in the month of *March*, three more in the same month the year after, and each of the first three had a young one before they had been thirteen months old.

## CHAP.

## CHAP. VIII.

*Of the Sea and Land Fowls at Hirta.*

**V**IRGIL, in the sixth book of the *Æneid*, compares an infinite multitude of melancholy ghosts, that fluttered about the banks of *Acheron*, and first to the number of leaves shaken down to the ground, by the first autumnal storm that strips a wood of its foliage, and afterwards to a vast flight of birds driven from the ocean by a cold season, into warmer countries\*. *Milton* made no scruple to borrow the first part of this simile, and for some reason,

- \* Thick as the leaves come flutt'ring from above  
 When cooler Autumn strips the blasted grove :  
 Thick as the feather'd flocks in close array,  
 O'er the wide fields of ocean wing their way ;  
 When from the rage of winter they repair  
 To warmer suns and more indulgent air.  
 All stretch their suppliant hands, and all implore  
 The first kind passage to the further shore.

Pitt.

reason, best known to himself, rejected the last, in that noble description of the fallen angels, lying on the burning lake, thunder-struck and half dead with astonishment, he employs the image of *Virgil's* autumnal leaves very happily, but keeps out the other drawn from the feathered tribes\*. It will be thought, perhaps, that *Virgil* rather sinks than rises in the last part of his simile, as there seems to be no room for a comparison between the number of leaves on the one hand, and that of birds on the other, and that *Milton's* comparison is more in the manner of a real landscape. But I am persuaded that the rocks of *St. Kilda* would convince any man that *Virgil's* fancy, in the instance now before us, was correct. Without employing a poetical figure, or the smallest exaggeration, it is literally true, that the rocks

\* *Satan* call'd

His Legions, Angel forms, who lay entranc'd  
Thick as Autumnal leaves that strow the brooks,  
In *Vallambrosa*, where the *Etrurian* shades  
High over-arch'd, imbow'r, or scatter'd sedge  
Aflote, when with fierce winds *Orion* arm'd,  
Hath vex'd the red sea coast.

rocks of *Boreray*, *Stack-in-Armin* and *Lij*, are in summer time totally covered with Solan-Geese and other fowls, and appear at a distance like so many mountains covered with snow. The nests of the Solan-Geese, not to mention those of other fowls, are so close that when one walks between them, the hatching fowls on either side can always take hold of one's cloaths, and they will often sit still until they are attacked, rather than expose their eggs to the danger of being destroyed by sea-gulls; at the same time an equal number fly about, and furnish food for their mates that are employed in hatching, and there are besides large flocks of barren fowls of the different tribes, that frequent the rocks of *St. Kilda*.

The Solan - Goose, according to some, derives its name from the *Galic* word *Sociler*, which denotes the sharpness of his sight. He observes his prey from a considerable height, and darts down upon it with incredible force. He equals almost a tame goose in size, his bill is long, sharp, and a little crooked at the point, his colour, except a little black on the extremities



mities of the wings, is white when a year old, but before that age a dark brown. The *St. Kildians* kill a Solan-Goose with great alertness, by dislocating a certain joint of the neck very near the head; the rest of the neck is made for strength, and adapted to the body in such a manner that without this art it would be difficult and tedious to kill them\*.

The Solan-Geese repair to *Hirta* in the month of *March*, and continue there till after the beginning of *November*. Before the middle of that month, they and all the other sea fowls that are so fond of this coast, retire much about the same time into some other favourite regions, so that not a single fowl belonging to their element is to be seen about *St. Kilda*, from the

\* The common amusement of the herring-fishers, shews the great strength of this fowl: The fishers fix a herring upon a board which has a small weight under it, to sink it a little below the surface of the sea: The Solan-Goose, observing the fish, darts down upon it perpendicularly, and with so much force that he runs his bill irrecoverably through the board, and is taken up directly by the fishers.

the beginning of winter down to the middle of *February*.

Whether one can rationally account for this migration, by resolving the matter into the severity of the *Hirta* climate, or the tempestuoufness of the sea around it, or into the migrations made by the fishes, with which these fowls support themselves, or into all these causes taken together, I shall not venture to determine. One thing is certain, that the Solan-Geese and some other tribes of these voracious birds, that sojourn here for more than the half of the year, feed principally upon herrings, and it is equally so, that though immense shoals of that fish are annually upon the coast of some other western isles, not a single Solan-Goose is to be seen there after *Michaelmas*.

“ The herrings,” said *Cambden*, “ which  
 “ in the time of our grand-fathers, swarm-  
 “ ed only about *Norway*, do now in our  
 “ times, by the bounty of Divine Provi-  
 “ dence, swim in great shoals round our  
 “ coast every year. About *Midsummer* they  
 “ draw from the main sea towards the  
 G “ coast

“ coast of *Scotland*, from thence they ar-  
 “ rive on our coasts ; and from the mid-  
 “ dle of *August* to *November* there is ex-  
 “ cellent and most plentiful fishing for  
 “ them, all along from *Scarborough* to the  
 “ *Thames*’ mouth. Afterwards, by stormy  
 “ weather they are carried into the *British*  
 “ sea, and are there caught till *Christmas*;  
 “ thence having ranged the coast of *Ire-*  
 “ *land*, on both sides, and gone round  
 “ *Britain*, they return into the northern  
 “ ocean, where they remain till *June*, and  
 “ after they have cast their spawn, return  
 “ again in great shoals.”

*Cambden*, undoubtedly, knew the history  
 and antiquities of his own country, bet-  
 ter than any one of his cotemporaries :  
 But I am apt to believe, that herrings  
 were known and caught in *Scotland* before  
 the æra settled by him. *Abercromby* in his  
 life of King *James* the Third, quotes a  
 law made in that monarch’s reign, and  
 about the year 1370. A law by which  
 “ certain Lords and Burgesses were or-  
 “ dered to make great ships, busses, and  
 “ pink-boats, with nets and all other ne-  
 “ cessaries for fishing.” I confess, that  
 author

author has not told us in plain language, whether these nets and other implements, were intended for the herring-fishing.— But any one will be ready to conclude so, from the preamble with which he has ushered in the act. Be that how it will, it is certain, beyond any possibility of doubt, that vast shoals of this excellent sort of fish are found upon the coast of Scotland now before *Midsummer*; and it is equally true, that they cast their spawn in our bays from year to year. The immense quantities of herring-fry, caught every autumnal season in the western isles, and elsewhere, affords a clear demonstration of this; and it is probable, that some great shoals of the larger kind hover about that coast all the year over.

It has been already observed, that the Solan-Geese make a longer stay in *Hirta* than in any other part of the *Deucalidonian* sea; but they retire from there before the herrings have quitted the adjacent coasts. Into what quarter of the world this tribe of wild fowl, and their *St. Kilda* companions repair, after the winter is set in, whether into the northern ocean, the na-

tive country, and winter quarters of herrings in general, or into some other region near the sun, or whether they be of the sleeping kind, they who pry into the mysteries of natural history, or have conversed much with writers of voyages, can best explain. I shall only pretend to say, that these different nations of the feathered kind are taught to chuse the properest habitations and feeding-places, and to shift their quarters seasonably, by an unerring instinct of nature, or to speak with the poet, they are directed by that God

Who bids the stork, *Columbus*-like, explore  
Heav'ns not his own, and worlds unknown before ;

Who calls the council, states the certain day,  
Who forms the phalanx, and who points the way.

The nest of the Solan-Goose is a large collection made up of very different materials; he carries any thing that is fit for his purpose, whether at land or floating on the waters, to the place where he builds, grass, sea-ware, shavings of timber, pieces of cloth, and very often other implements which he must have got in some foreign land ;



land; yet such is the difficulty in furnishing a sufficient quantity of these different materials for building, that they often encroach on their neighbours' property, and the manner in which they do it, shews that *want* has given them notions of *property*, that are not known among fowls where *plenty* renders them unnecessary: If a Solon-Goose finds his neighbour's nest at any time without the fowl, he takes advantage of his absence, steals as much of the materials of it as he can conveniently carry, and sensible of the injustice he hath done, takes his flight directly towards the ocean: if the lawful owner does not discover the injury he has suffered, before the thief is out of sight, he escapes with impunity, and returns soon with his burden, as if he had made a foreign purchase.

It has been said, that one of the corps acts the part of a centinel, while the other Solan-Geese are asleep, gives the alarm if an enemy should approach, and that a general massacre may be easily made, if this centinel be surpris'd and dispatched. The present *St. Kildians* deny that the safety of the whole flock depends so much upon the

vigilance of *one* of their number ; but they told me, that they always understand, from the different accents of these creatures, or from the different modulations of their voices, whether they are actuated by hope or fear. At night, while the creeping fowlers hear them cry *Grog, Grog*, they continue to approach without any fears of alarming them, but as soon as they hear *Bir, Bir*, they halt ; if the fowls who were alarmed of the approaching danger, are not able to discover the enemy, they give the signal of security *Grog, Grog*, the fowlers then advance, and lay, with great caution, the first Solan-Goose which they kill, among his old companions ; and the *St. Kildians* have given me repeated assurances, that the living begin to mourn immediately over their departed friend, with a lamentable tone of voice, examining his body very narrowly with their bills, and are so deeply affected, that the fowlers improve their sorrow and confusion, much to their own advantage.

The *St. Kilda* community have no more than a single boat, which must lie idle all winter, and is filled up with stones and earth in a secure place, to prevent the  
greatest

greatest of all public calamities, that of its being swept away into the sea, or dashed against a rock by a violent gust of wind.—About the middle of *March*, a select band of adventurers put to sea in this boat, and go to the neighbouring isles, upon an expedition to them of very great importance. This is the season for catching the old Solan-Geese before they begin to lay; they hunt them in the night-time, through steep, and (to all other men inaccessible) precipices; as many as are not intended for immediate consumption, are secured within the little houses or barns, more than once mentioned, without salt, or using any other art to preserve them, than opening their backs, and washing them clean. They go upon another expedition to these isles about the middle of *May*. This is the season for gathering the eggs of the Solan-Geese, all of that kind that fall in the way at *Boreray*, and *Stack-in-Armin*, excepting those that are soon to be consumed, they keep in their little stone houses.—Great numbers of these eggs lie there, till the month of *July*, without any care taken to preserve them, an art which this indelicate people would most heartily

despise, should one be at the pains to instruct them in it. By that time these eggs must unavoidably be offensive, and intolerably so, to the senses of any other race of men. But to the men and women of *Hirta*, such is the power of early prejudices, and inveterate habits, they afford a most agreeable repast. It is surprising enough, that the taste of this people should be so strangely debauched in their appetites; But more so, that their health is not in the least affected, as far as I could learn, by this seemingly pernicious sort of aliment.

While the rocks of *Boreray* and *Stack-in-Armin* are thus plundered, all the eggs laid in the rock called *Lij*, are held inviolably sacred. This is an anciently established custom: and should any one break it, it is the universal opinion, that the whole constitution is entirely subverted.—The young Solan-Goose is fit for use in the month of *September*, if the first egg laid by the old one remains untouched. If otherwise, the young fowl is not fit for the table till the month of *October*.—Then, and not till then, the community have,

have, besides the rock of *Lij*, other resources in this way, I mean those of *Boreray* and *Stack-in-Armin*.

Before the young Solan-Geese, which they call *Goug*, fly off, they are larger than the mothers, and excessively fat.—— The fat on their breasts is sometimes three inches deep: The inhabitants of *Hirta* have a method of preserving their greese in a kind of bag, made of the stomach of the old Solan-Goose caught in *March*. In their language it is called *Gibain*; and this oily kind of thick substance, manufactured in their way, they use by way of sauce, or instead of butter, among their porridge and flummery. In the adjacent islands they administer this oily substance to their cattle, if seized with violent colds, or obstinate coughs; and it is the general belief, that the application of the *Gibain*, in such cases, has a very good effect.

Another sea-fowl highly esteemed in this island, is the Tulmer. I was not a little entertained with the encomiums they bestowed on this bird. “Can the world,”

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said



said one of the most sensible men at *Hirta* to me, “ exhibit a more valuable commodity? The Tulmer furnishes oil for the lamp, down for the bed, the most salubrious food, and the most efficacious ointments for healing wounds, besides a thousand other virtues of which he is possessed, which I have not time to enumerate. But, to say all in one word, deprive us of the Tulmer, and *St. Kilda* is no more.”

This bird is in size much the same with an ordinary barn hern, but his legs and wings are much longer. Over the back, wings and tail, he is of a light grey colour: round the breast and neck, more whitish; his head is round, his neck short and thick; his bill is made for strength, bending inwards, pointed like that of an eagle, and in length about an inch and an half. He is a most ravenous fowl, and feeds only on sorrel and the fat of fish. Pieces of whale, and seal blubber, are often found in his nest.

This fowl lays no more than one egg in a season, being peculiarly sterile among all the  
the

the different tribes of birds that haunt this isle. It is observed, that he takes revenge for robbing his nest of this egg. So exquisitely nice are his feelings, and so strong his resentment, that he conceives an unconquerable aversion for his nest if one breathes over it, and will never pay it any more visits: For this reason, to plunder his nest, or to offer indignity to it, is in *Hirta* a high crime and misdemeanour.

Every one who is possessed of a bit of land there, has a proportionable share of the rocks in which the fowls hatch.— The divisions are made with a singular exactness. The smallest encroachment on a *St. Kildian's* property, in these rocks, is by an ancient custom severely punished.

The young ones of this species, are in season about the beginning of *August*. This is the term at which the tenant takes possession of his farm, and this fowl may be properly enough called the first fruits of it. How soon the young *Tulmer* is attacked in the nest, he endeavours to disconcert the enemy, by spouting out a quantity of oil at his wide nostrils, which he squirts away

away directly into the face and eyes of the fowler; and this instinctive stratagem gives him frequently an opportunity to make his escape. But those who are versed in this diversion, take all possible precautions to surprize him; the more so, that they think the oil, furnished by this fowl, incomparably precious, and for that reason will exert the whole power of their skill and dexterity to save it. Yet in spite of all their care, the fowlers are totally besmeared with it, and any part of their cloaths, that is touched by an oil so spirituous, will burn like a candle. Every Tulmer yields near an *English* pint of this liquid substance, which drops out at the nostrils of the fowl while warm, and a considerable quantity of it is annually preserved in the isle. Of the fowls themselves, every family has a great number salted in casks for winter provisions, and the amount of the whole is about twelve barrels.

The third species of the *Hirta* birds, that deserve a particular description, is there called Lavie, and ought perhaps to stand foremost on the list, as they are the earliest

Next visitants in *February*, and bring to the island the auspicious presages of their approaching felicity.

No sooner do these thrice welcome harbingers of plenty and universal happiness appear on the coast, than the most considerable persons in this small state assemble together, to congratulate one another on this great occasion, and withal to settle the operations of their campaign. With this view they divide their people into parties, made up of their ablest fowlers. They who sustain that high character, are those experienced men who manage the ropes, to be hereafter described, clamber through the most tremendous rocks, and stalk there, with the greatest address and intrepidity. On the first acquisition of this prey, the people feast very lovingly together, the heart of every one overflowing with joy.

The Lavie in size resembles a duck, though rather longer, and hardly so thick: He is black above, the whole breast and belly white, with a circle of the same colour round the neck; the bill is black and sharp at the point: the egg is longer than

than that of the bird I have compared it to, and most beautifully variegated with a great diversity of colours, black, white and red, blue, green and yellow; and what to me was surprising, scarce any two of them very like one another.

This fowl builds nothing in the way of nest, but lays her egg on the shelf of a bare rock, where she plants it in so very nice a manner, that if once touched, one will find it impossible to fix it in the same place again. So slender is the hold these eggs have of the rock, that they tumble down into the sea in thick showers, if the fowls are surprized, so as to start away in a hurry.

As soon as the Lavie is discovered on the coast, the heroes who have formerly distinguished themselves by such feats, go down, with the help of their ropes, into the well-known shelves of those rocks, each having a broad piece of linen, or any thing remarkably white, fixed on his breast. This operation is done in the night time: the bird mistaking an object so conspicuous for a part of the rock, endeavours

yours.



yours to cling to it, and is immediately caught and dispatched. In this posture the fowler continues till about the dawn: then, and not till then, whatever his success may be, he makes the wonted signal, that is, he pulls the rope at which his life hangs: his companion, who stands above, takes care in the first place to secure the prey, which sometimes consists of no less than four hundred Lavies; and once that is done, helps or hauls up the adventurer, who is not without reason highly extolled for his prowess, and most graciously received by all his friends.

As the *St. Kildians* have for many ages used this art, it has become to them a very simple one. But to a stranger who makes any reflections, it must be not a little surprizing, that any one of the more antient natives should have had ingenuity enough to devise the stratagem of the white cloath, or plant himself in a shelf in the night time, with any reasonable expectation of intercepting a creature made for flying.

What the true *English* name of the Lavye may be, I know not with any degree  
of

of certainty. There are two sorts of migrating sea-birds, which breed in *Ramsay* island, on the coast of *Pembroke-shire*, one of which goes under the name of *Eligug* or *Shout*, and the other under that of *Rarorbil*. From the account given by Mr. *Lloyd* of these two species, in his supplement to *Cambden's Britannia*, under the article, *Dimetæ*, an account rather too indistinct, I conclude that the *St. Kilda* Lave is either the *Eligug* or *Rarorbil* of the *English* and *Welsh*.

The Bougir of *Hirta* is by some called the Coulterneb, and by others the Puffin: This is a very fine sprightly bird, in size much like a pigeon: it seems to be conscious of its own beauty, cocking its head very smartly, and assuming great airs of majesty: its colour is black on the outer parts, and about the breast, red and white: the legs are red, and the beak fashioned like a coulter, edged above, and most charmingly painted with red and yellow below.

Incredible flights of these Puffins flutter, during the whole summer season, round about *St. Kilda* and the two isles pertaining  
ing

ing to it: sometimes they cover whole plots of ground, and sometimes while on wing, involve every thing below them in darkness, like a small cloud of locusts in another country.

There are two different species of them, the one larger and the other smaller, with some other marks of diversity, scarce worthy of being pointed out; their feathers are the softest produced here; their eggs are white, and of much the same bigness with those of a hen.

The people of this isle live mostly all the summer on the two kinds of this fowl, together with eggs of various sorts; and I shall make no difficulty of affirming, that the place could easily afford enough of these different articles to support two thousand persons more during that season.

Here I must remark, that every place has advantages peculiar to itself. If other countries are furnished with a variety of the luxuries, *St. Kilda* possesses in a remarkable degree the necessaries of life.

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The inhabitants of this the obscurest island in the world, have strong proofs of the equal dispensations of Providence.— The Lavie visits them most seasonably in the month of *February*, when their fresh mutton and bread are perhaps nearly exhausted, and continues to furnish plentiful repasts till the Solan Geese appear in *March*. These supply their wants till they begin to lay. Then are these succeeded by the Puffins and a variety of eggs. When their appetites are cloyed by a frequent use of this food, the salubrious Tulmer, and their favourite young Solan Goose, crown their humble boards with grander entertainments, and hold out all autumn over : in winter they have generally a greater stock of bread, mutton and salted fowl, than they are able to consume : I shall speak elsewhere of the fish very liberally furnished by their seas. Upon the whole, in spite of hard usage, and peculiar disadvantages, they feed more luxuriously, if that be a part of human felicity, than perhaps any small or great nation of *Slaves*, upon the face of the whole earth.

I had

I had not an opportunity of knowing a very curious fowl, sometimes seen upon this coast, and an absolute stranger, I am apt to believe, in every other part of *Scotland*. The men of *Hirta* call it the Gare-fowl, corruptly perhaps instead of Rare-fowl, a name probably given it by some, one of those foreigners whom either choice or necessity drew into this secure region. This bird is above four feet in length, from the bill to the extremities of its feet; its wings are, in proportion to its size, very short, so that they can hardly poise or support the weight of its very large body. His legs, neck, and bill, are extremely long; it lays the egg, which according to the account given me, exceeds that of a goose, no less than the latter exceeds the egg of a hen, close by the sea mark, being incapable, on account of its bulk, to soar up to the cliffs. It makes its appearance in the month of *July*. The *St. Kildians* do not receive an annual visit from this strange bird, as from all the rest in the list, and from many more. It keeps at a distance from them, they know not where, for a course of years. From what land or ocean it makes its uncertain voyages  
to



to their isle, is perhaps a mystery in nature. A gentleman who had been in the *West-indies*, informed me, that according to the description given of him, he must be the Penguin of that clime, a fowl that points out the proper soundings to seafaring people.

At *Hirta* is too frequently seen, and very severely felt, a large sea-gull, which is detested by every *St. Kildian*. This mischievous bird destroys every egg that falls in its way, very often the young fowls, and sometimes the weakest of the old. It is hardly possible to express the hatred with which this otherwise good-natured people, pursue these gulls. If one happen to mention them, it throws their whole blood into a ferment: serpents are not all such detestable objects any where else.

They exert their whole strength of industry and skill to get hold of this cruel enemy, a task very far from being easy, as they are no less vigilant than wicked: if caught, they outvie one another in torturing this imp of hell to death; such is the emphatical language in which they express

express an action so grateful to their vindictive spirit: they pluck out his eyes, sew his wings together, and send him a drift: To eat any of its eggs, though among the largest and best their isle affords, would be accounted a most flagitious action, and worthy of a monster only: they extract the meat out of the shell and leave that quite empty in the nest: the gull sits upon it till she pines away.

This fowl is perfectly white in the breast and downwards, blueish along the back, and black in the wings: it is of the seamaw kind, and equal in size to a Solan-Goose, or nearly so: they call it Tuliac in *St. Kilda*; but in the other western isles it goes under a different name.

It will, I apprehend, be thought unnecessary, by this time, to give a minute detail of all the other more ignoble or useless tribes of sea and land fowl, that frequent the *St. Kilda* rocks and isles. There is a great variety of them: One species, numerous enough, is called the Sgrobir, and another the Ashilag: Sea-magpyes are here, and what is much stranger, mag-

pyes have been in the isle, more than once, though very seldom in any other part of the western Æbuda: there are herons, curlews, pigeons, plovers, besides the small classes of sparrows, larks, starlings and wrens. How these little birds, I mean the wrens particularly, could have flown thither, or whether they went accidentally in boats, I leave undetermined. Should it be asserted here, that *St. Kildians* have, by the dint of stalking, caught herons, that are the most watchful fowls in the world, I am afraid the story would hardly be credited, though the fact seems to be very well attested.

At *Hirta* are some ravens of the largest sort, and a few eagles, which though very pernicious elsewhere, are perfectly harmless here, the reason I conceive must be, that their necessities are more than sufficiently supplied by the inexhaustable stores of eggs that must every other moment fall in their way. This must be the case in summer. How they procure their food in winter is a question which one will find some greater difficulty in resolving, unless we take it for granted that they make frequent excursions into the neighbouring isles.

CHAP.

## CHAP. IX.

*Of Augurs and Auspices.*

SOME different tribes of the *Hirta* birds, particularly the Tulmer, the large Sea-gull and smaller Maws, quit their native element upon certain occasions, and retire to the land. Here they flutter about the fields, or hover above the houses; and as if highly dissatisfied with their condition, shift every moment from place to place, now rising up and immediately lighting upon the ground, or threatening to do so. This phenomenon is by the *St. Kildians*, and all the other islanders, reckoned an infallible prognostic of an approaching tempest. That the same opinion prevailed among the antients, with regard to some of these fowls, is plain from those lines of *Virgil* in the first book of the *Georgics*, which I shall give the reader in *Warton's* translation:

From the frail bark that plows the raging main,  
The greedy waves unwillingly refrain;  
When loud the cormorant screams and seeks the  
land,  
And coots and sea-gulls sport upon the sand.

Here

Here the learned gentleman distinguishes the Coot from the Sea-gull (though his author confines his observation to the *Tulica* only) not without reason in my opinion, as that general word comprehends under it more than one species of the same kind. Another remark I shall take the liberty to make is, that the vocable *mergi* belongs very properly to a great variety of diving birds, and may be applied to the *Hirta* Tulmer, without any violence as well as to any one else. I add further that the first of these words, *Tulica*, is the very name commonly given in the *Galic* tongue to the Sea-Maw, if we only leave out the *Roman* termination: nor need one be surprized at this, or at any other similarity of the same kind. To resolve the thing into an accidental agreement of sounds is far from being reasonable. Some *Celtic* nations had more than once overrun *Italy*: they possessed a considerable part of it for a very long time, I mean the *Cisalpine Gaul*, and must of course have left many vocables of their language behind them. It is certain that the *Romans* never made a conquest of those countries in which the *Galic* prevails, and therefore

we



we may with reason conclude, that *Italy* must have borrowed the vocable now in question from the *Celtic*, of which the *Galic* is undoubtedly a dialect.

But to return to the subject of prognostications. The islanders in general possess the art of predicting the changes of the weather, perhaps in much greater perfection than many of those who are beyond doubt superior to them in some other branches of knowledge. Every one must be sensible that this science is in many instances highly beneficial to a people whose business leads them to agriculture and the sea, however fallacious it may be on some occasions. Of that matter men of sense may judge as they please; but so it is that the *St. Kildians* and their neighbours owe much of their knowledge in this way, whether real or imaginary, to the observations they and their predecessors have made on the screamings, flight, and other motions of birds, and more especially on their migrations from one place to another.

The truly philosophical manner in which the great *Latin* poet has accounted for the joyful

joyful croakings of the raven species, upon a favourable change of weather, will, in my apprehension, point out at the same time the true natural causes of that spirit of divination, with regard to storms of wind, rain or snow, by which the sea-gull, tulmer, cormorant, heron, crow, plover, and other birds, are actuated sometime before the change comes on\*. It is no unpardonable presumption in me, to think that all the commentators and translators, that

- \* Tum liquidas corvi presso ter gutture voces  
 Aut quater ingeminat; et sæpe cubilibus altis,  
 Nescio qua præter solitum dulcedine læti  
 Inter se foliis strepitant (juvat imbribus æstis  
 Progeniem parvam dulcesque revisere nidos)  
 Haud equidem, credo, quia sit divinitus illis  
 Ingenium, aut rerum fata prudentia major;  
 Verum ubi tempestas et cæli mobilis humor  
 Mutavere vias, et Jupiter humidus austris  
 Denfat, erant quæ rara modo, et quæ densa,  
 relaxat  
 Vertuntur species animorum, et pectora motus  
 Nunc alios, alios, dum nubila ventus agebat,  
 Concipiunt: Hinc ille avium concentus in  
 agris,  
 Et lætæ pecudes, et ovantes gutture corvi.

fell in my way, have spoiled the beauty of that passage, and mistaken its grammatical construction. I shall therefore take the liberty of translating it in my way: the poet is enumerating the various signs of approaching fair weather. The ravens afford one of these prognostics. Our author then explains the manner how, and the reason why.

“ Then the ravens, compressing their  
 “ throats three or four times, redouble  
 “ shriller notes; and often in their lofty  
 “ bed-rooms rustle together against the  
 “ leaves, elated by I know not what pleasure beyond their usual mood (to revisit their tender offspring and dear nests, after those showers which confined them too long there are spent away, gives them the highest satisfaction) not indeed, according to my opinion, because they are inspired with prescience by the  
 “ Gods, nor because Fate has given them  
 “ a more extensive knowledge of things  
 “ than most other beings have received:  
 “ not so: but, after the stormy wind and  
 “ the changeful water of the sky, shall  
 “ have altered their courses, and after the

“ God of Rain condenses, with the help  
“ of the dark southerly winds, those things  
“ which were just before rare, and rari-  
“ fies what was dense, the ideas formed  
“ by those Beings, which have a prin-  
“ ciple of sense and cogitation, take a new  
“ turn, and their souls receive different  
“ impressions, very different from those they  
“ had within them when the wind was  
“ driving the clouds about : hence it is  
“ that the birds join in concert through  
“ the fields : hence it is that the cattle  
“ rejoice, and hence is the ovation of the  
“ raven’s throat.”

The poet has taken the liberty here, like an honest Free-thinker, to examine with candor and to censure with great modesty the established belief of ages. He had too much sense, and too little superstition, to account for the presages of birds, with regard to the variations of the weather, agreeably to the doctrine taught by the Augurs of his own and other countries.— He did not believe like the followers of *Plato*, that ravens were enabled by *Apollo* or any other God, to predict future events ; nor could he think like the *Stoics*, that fate

fate did give, or could have given, a greater share of natural knowledge to them, than had been allowed to other Beings. He rejects the systems of these two sects, as far as this point was concerned, and follows that of *Epicurus*. In short, he resolves the prognostications of ravens, not into an extraordinary interposition of Heaven, nor into the capricious humour of a blind fatality, but into plain physical causes, the influence of the atmosphere. The different pressures of this atmosphere, or in other words, the different directions given by nature to the clouds, winds, and waters above, will make different impressions on the spirits of animals or birds, so as to give them a new turn. A change or contrariety of impressions will unavoidably produce a contrariety of motions, will produce new images, new passions, new affections, in a word, a new disposition of mind. From these various and incompatible images, passions and affections, we are to account for those hours of dulness and good humour, for those exulting songs, melancholy ditties, obstinate silence, frequent migrations, and other inconsistencies by



which Birds express their internal feelings at different times.

Every discerning person that lives in the country, especially if near the sea, must have observed, that several classes of the feathered kind are taught by the constitution of their souls and bodies, to foresee the changes of the weather; and observations of the same kind must have been made by mankind in ancient times. But whether the art of divining, by Birds in another way, began in *Chaldaea*, *Phrygia* or *Greece*, whether it was invented by *Prometheus* or *Melampus*, by *Tiresias*, or any one else that has been reputed the father of it, it is impossible to determine, and idle to enquire.

I know some men have derived the origin of this science, and of navigation together with it, from *Noah's* raven, pigeon and ark. But without going so far back, we may easily find out the true beginning of Auguries and Auspices, in the plain subject now before us. Some men of uncommon sagacity, it is impossible to say who, or where, saw reason to conclude from many

many sensible observations, that certain birds by their motions and accents, prognosticated winds and rain, while others foretold, in another manner, sunney days and serene weather. They seeing their own observations confirmed very frequently by corresponding events, and misled by that superstition which is inherent in human nature, thought that all such birds must have been divinely inspired: but as the predictions, which came from them, were partly favourable to mankind, and partly otherwise, they found it reasonable to divide these ominous birds into two classes, the *lucky* and *unlucky*. On the unmeaning actions or idleness of such silly birds; on their silence, singing, chirping, chattering and croaking, on their feeding or abstinence, on their flying to the right hand or left, was founded an art: which from a low and simple beginning grew to an immense height, and gained a surprizing degree of credit in a deluded world.

I am not able to recollect any passage in our sacred volumes, from which it can be naturally enough inferred, that the *Egyptians* or *Phœnicians*, the *Israelites* or *Ama-*

rites, the *Chaldeans*, or any other Eastern nation, however superstitiously inclined all these were, did practise this kind of divination. We read frequently in the books of *Moses* and elsewhere, of wizards, necromancers, incanters, magicians, soothsayers, charmers and observers of times, of those who consulted familiar spirits and witches: of consulting the liver or entrails of a beast, that is to say, the *Extispicium* of the *Latins*; of consulting arrows, rods or wands, the *Rabdomanteia* of the *Greeks*, we read in *Ezekiel* and *Hosea*. But concerning augurs and auspices we have nothing, I think, in the Old Testament. From this consideration one will be ready to conclude, that the true canon of the Old Testament was compleated before this art was known to the oriental nations, or at least to the *Jews*: if so, this foolish science was probably invented by the *Scythians* of the north, or rather by the *Celtic* nations of the west; and by them communicated to the *Tusians*, the great patrons and improvers of it or perhaps first to the *Greeks*. Be this how it will, it is certain that the *Gauls* and *Germans* were remarkably addicted to it; and from

from either of these, or both, it made its way into the several parts of *Britain*.

As ignorance was the mother of that devotion which the judicious part of mankind paid to augurs and their ridiculous craft; it will be naturally suspected, that the *Highlanders* must have had extraordinary regard for those of that profession. I confess, this suspicion is far from being ill founded. Within less than a century back there were some impostors in that country, shameless enough to boast of their skill in understanding the language of birds, like *Apollonius Tyanæus*; nor can it be denied, that there were found in that part of this kingdom men foolish enough to honour and reward these pretenders.

Of inspired birds, ravens were accounted the most prophetic. Accordingly, in the language of that district, *To have the foresight of a raven*, is to this day a proverbial expression, denoting a preternatural sagacity in predicting fortuitous events. But the same superstitious conceit prevailed among the more learned nations of *Greece* and *Italy*. Ravens were sacred there to

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*Apollo,*

*Apollo*, the great patron of augurs, and were called the companions and attendants of that God.

In former times, it was the universal belief of the vulgar in the *Western Isles*, that ominous birds, of one kind or other, but generally of the more auspicious sort, hovered about every great family, some time before any considerable person there was to die. These birds were accounted the genii of those who were to leave this world, or messengers sent from the other world, with timely intimations of their approaching end. How soon the person had expired, the ominous bird immediately disappeared; or if the fowl was destroyed by some marksman, or by any other accident, the devoted man immediately expired.

These harbingers of death were generally crows, ravens, kites, sea-maws, doves or sparrows, and sometimes strange birds seen only on such melancholy occasions. If these feathered prophets were of a whitish colour, here was a proof equal to a revelation sent from above, that the departing



parting person was to be infallibly translated into heaven: if otherwise, the direful omen was thought to foredoom him, without mercy, to the regions of darkness and endless sorrow.

Foolish reveries of this kind are the growth of all countries. Some writers tell us, that a great number of crows fluttered about *Cicero's* head, on the very day he was murdered by the ungrateful *Popilius Lænas*, as if to warn him of his approaching fate; and that one of them, after having made its way into his chamber, pulled away his very bed-cloaths, from a solicitude for his safety; and according to the author of the *Æneid*, the solitary owl foretold the tragical end of the unhappy *Dido*. *Suetonius*, who took it into his head to relate all the imaginary prodigies that preceded the deaths of his twelve *Cæsars*, in a very dull narrative, never misses an opportunity so favourable of doing justice to the prophetic character of some one bird or other. It is surprising that *Tacitus*, a person of the deepest understanding, and no great friend to religion, should have given into the same folly. But men of  
that

that complexion are upon occasions abundantly superstitious, and professed atheists have sometimes been so.

According to a conceit that prevailed some time ago in the *Highlands*, the birds, which were trusted with the honourable employment of prognosticating the death of great men, placed themselves near their houses, and sometimes took the liberty to stand on the thresh-hold, or to lie in a window. But the messengers of the feathered kind, which were made to stoop down to the low employment of serving those of the poorer sort in the same way, were obliged to keep at a reasonable distance from houses, to roam about from place to place, and to utter their predictions in the night time only. Those ignoble genii mostly haunted the roads leading to the churchyard, and there screamed loudly. If their inharmonious voices were heard in the first part of the night, the persons to whom these goblins belonged were undoubtedly near the gates of death: if otherwise, they had a chance of surviving these premonitions, for some years: meantime, there were some, who  
upon

upon hearing the shrieks of the inauspicious birds, knew immediately the individuals to whom they belonged.

It happened sometimes that two of these unlucky monitors, meeting in a place which lay close to the burying ground, fought a most desperate battle: it was thought, that the fray must have been occasioned by a point of honour, each of them being ambitious to have the precedence, or the ill-natured satisfaction of bringing his man to his grave before any other. This was the general opinion. But some who would be thought more shrewd than their neighbours, maintained stiffly, and with the same appearance of reason, that each of these birds studied to ward off the impending blow, from the person in whom he was interested.

We are told by *Cicero*\*, that all kings, nations and tribes, made use of auspices. The same great author adds, that the *Pisidians*, *Cicilians* and *Phrygians*, excelled in that kind of divination. Any one who looks into *Livy* will find a clear demonstration

\* De Divinat. lib. II.

stration of that blind respect and passive obedience with which the wisest nation in the universe honoured those political impostors, who went under the name of augurs. Greece received their dictates like oracular responses, with an implicit submission. It is true, some of the most sensible men had a supreme contempt for this strange system of state tricks and popular folly: some condemned it tacitly: some ridiculed it openly, and called the professors of it cheats and impostors. *Fabius Maximus* among the Romans, though himself an augur, had the honest fortitude to say, much like *Hector* in the *Iliad*, that the best of all auguries was the interest of the common wealth, and that every thing done in contradiction to that great law was done against the auspices. But still the bulk of every nation had the profoundest veneration for all the impertinencies, grimace and puerilities, of this mock theology.

It is universally agreed, that the most ancient inhabitants of Britain must have derived their origin either from the Gauls or Germans. The former were incomparable

able proficient in the science of augury, if we believe Justin\* ; and the latter were excessively addicted to it, we learn from Tacitus†. That the posterity of such ancestors could have escaped the infection of so universal a disease of the mind, it is impossible to believe ; and that those who lived in the remotest parts of *Britain*, in a situation peculiarly unfavourable to the liberal arts and sciences, should, some time after the rest of their countrymen had been cured of this mental imbecility, retain some little remains of it, is far from being matter of wonder.

But enough has been said concerning these idle notions : I shall only observe farther, that they are no longer believed in the Highlands and isles.

\* Justin. lib. xxiv. cap. 4.

† De mor. Germ. cap. 9.



## CHAP. XI.

*Of the St. Kilda methods of catching wild fowl.*

I HAVE hinted above, that the men of *Hirta* are divided into fowling parties, each of which consists generally of four persons distinguished by their agility and skill. Each party must have at least one rope about thirty fathoms long : this rope is made out of a strong, raw cow hide, salted for that very purpose, and cut circularly into three thongs, all of equal length ; these thongs being closely twisted together, form a three-fold cord, able to sustain a great weight, and durable enough to last for about two generations : to prevent the injuries it would otherwise receive from the sharp edges of the rocks, against which they must frequently strike, the cord is lined with sheep-skins dressed in much the same manner.

This

This rope is a piece of furniture indispensably necessary, and the most valuable implement a man of substance can be possessed of in *St. Kilda*. In the testament of a father, it makes the very first article in favour of his eldest son: should it happen to fall to a daughter's share, in default of male heirs, it is reckoned equal in value to the two best cows in the isle.

By the help of such ropes, the people of the greatest prowess and experience here traverse and examine rocks prodigiously high. Linked together in couples, each having either end of the cord fastened about his waste; they go frequently thro' the most dreadful precipices: when one of the two descends, his colleague plants himself on a strong shelf, and takes care to have such sure footing there, that if his fellow adventurer makes a false step, and tumbles over, he may be able to save him\*.

Un-

\* The following anecdote of the present steward of *St. Kilda's* deputy, in the summer after I left the island, will give the reader a specimen of the danger they undergo, and at the

Undoubtedly these are stupendous adventures, and equal to any thing in the feats of chivalry: I was present at an operation of this kind. My curiosity led me too far to see so uncommon a trial of skill: before it was half over, I was greatly shocked and most heartily sick of it. Two noted heroes were drawn out from among all the ablest men of the community: one of them fixed himself on a craggy shelf: his companion went down sixty fathoms below him; and after having darted himself away from the face of a most alarming precipice, hanging over the ocean, he began to play his gambols: he sung merrily, and laughed very heartily. The crew were inexpressibly happy, but for my part, I was all the while in such distress of mind, that I could not far my life run over half the scene with my eyes. The  
fowler

the same time of the uncommon strength of the *St. Kildians*: This man observing his colleague lose his hold, tumbling down from above, placed himself so firmly, upon the shelf where he stood, that he sustained the weight of his friend, after falling the whole length of the rope.

fowler after having performed several antick tricks, and given us all the entertainment his art could afford, returned in triumph, and full of his own merit, with a large string of fowls round his neck, and a number of eggs in his bosom.

The *St. Kildians*, besides the more costly and valuable rope already described, have another kind, made of horse hair; which is generally about nine or ten fathoms long. This they use in places more accessible, where the game is of a more ignoble kind, and so much the more easily mastered. They have gins made of the same materials, which are fastened to the end of a stake deeply fixed in the ground. With these gins they catch a great number of wild fowl. They have other gins made likewise of horse hair, which they tie to the end of their fishing rods, and extended to the fowls in the opposite cliffs, who sometimes thrust their heads through them, and by that means give the fowlers an opportunity of snatching them up.

During

During the summer season the women of *Hirta*, like the maids of antient *Sparta*, are much employed in fowling: the principal game that falls to their share, is the small sprightly bird called the Puffin.— This fowl hatches under ground, and is easily traced out by means of the hole through which it makes its way; the hole it digs with its beak. The wife or daughter of a family makes a short excursion from home in a morning, attended by a dog, and catches what may be a sufficient provision for the whole family, at least for one day; every family in the island is furnished with one or more of those extraordinary dogs. They are a mixture of the tarrier, spaniel, and those that take the water: of their own accord they sally out early enough and soon return, bringing five or six puffins at a time.

Sitting on the side of a hill with some of the people, I saw one of these little dogs stealing away from us: the men told me he would soon return with a considerable booty; accordingly he came back in half an hour and laid down his prey at his master's feet; being taught by experience,



rience, and some friendly stroakings, that his owner had a just sense of the obligation, he went off a second time, and had much the same success.

These dogs have a wonderful sagacity, and are so trained, that they neither destroy the fowls themselves, nor part with them till they meet the people of the family to which they belong, in spite of threatenings, flattery or bribes.

All the rocks of the island, whether productive of fowls or fish, are divided with singular exactness, according to the proportion of land each man possesses. At the end of three years, the people exchange their divisions of these rocks, and the disputes, if any arise upon this head, are terminated by the decision of lots: the least encroachment upon a rock that belongs to another, is an injury scarce less atrocious than to steal a cow, and is punished without any indulgence.

Nothing can possibly exceed the intrepidity and alertness of the *St. Kildians* on some occasions. To land in *Stack-in-Armin*,

*min*, *Stack-Birach*, and *Lij*, the rocks which lie beyond the principal island, is a most desperate undertaking. When the weather is fair and the sea smooth, they man their boat with eight of their ablest hands:—the steward's deputy is their sea captain and land officer; he has an indefeasible right to manage the helm and issue out orders: these honours or high privileges expose him to greater dangers; he is the first person to land, and the last to quit the field. In the language of the place, this heroic adventurer is called *Gingach*.

After having laid by all incumbrances, his upper cloaths and his shoes, he fastens a strong rope around his waste, the other end of it being in the boat; and as soon as the wave rises to a proper height, he springs out toward the rock with all the agility he is master of, and employs the whole power of his hands and feet, sometimes of his teeth and nails, to settle himself there; if he falls back into the sea, the affront gives him infinitely more pain than the severe drenching; his fellows haul him in, and he repeats the experiment: if he succeeds in the attempt, which

is generally the case, he fixes himself in a secure place, makes the rope fast, and gives his companions an opportunity of coming ashore. Four of the crew, being left in the boat where they must remain at their oars till the commander and his party return.

After the sport is over, they go aboard their boat in the same manner: the *Gingach* places himself in his old station, and after having lent his aid to the three men, he ties an end of the halter to a part of the cliff, and slides down upon it, if the sea is favourable; if otherwise, he orders the people at the oars to row off to a proper distance, and jumps undauntedly into the water, these take him up immediately, and receive so brave a leader with loud claps of applause. This is the constant and only method of landing on the rocks around *Hirta*.

I was foolish enough to engage in an adventure of this kind at *Stack-in-Armin*, but dare not recommend the same operation to any friend, however strong his curiosity may be. I was towed up against the

the face of a rock forty feet high: the enterprize was sufficiently bold; but surely is no more than childish play, if compared to the manly feats of those who attempt *Stack-Birach*.

This rock is about forty feet high, something smooth on the top, which is formed much like a circle, the diameter about twelve feet: the angle formed by the face of the rock, and the most accessible part of the circumference of that circle is almost a sort of right one; and yet such is the lust of praise and profit together, that they scale this tremendous precipice every year for the sake of eggs and wild fowl: this hardy exploit is far from being the effect of necessity: but those pleasures and advantages which are dearly bought, or pursued amidst imminent dangers, are tasted and enjoyed with greater relish.

Here it is to be observed, that there is no more than a single egg found in any nest at *Hirta*; except in the nests of the sea-gulls who have always three. Every bird, it is true, lays a second, should it be robbed of the first, and perhaps a third,  
if

It has been already observed that they have but one boat in *St. Kilda*, and on it their happiness greatly depends: if some fatal accident should deprive them of it, they are inexpressibly miserable, and no less dejected, than a great and once flourishing state would be after the devastations of an unsuccessful war, or the ravages made by a more consuming pestilence.

This poor people were in this calamitous situation, after I left them, in the year 1759. On the sixth of October that year, nineteen of their men put to sea, bound for the island of *Boreray*; ten of them landed there; the remaining nine intended to go back to *Hirta*: for three successive days the wind blew so furiously that



that there was no possibility of landing any where.

They sheltered themselves all that time under the lee side of one of the high rocks of *St. Kilda*, being half starved with cold and hunger. On the fourth day of their distress they made for the bay, tho' without any prospect of safety; they steered for the sandy-beach on which we landed; here three of the men were washed away, and the remaining six were driven by the force of a wave on the beach, the boat was broke to pieces.

The unhappy men left at *Boreray* were soon made sensible of the common calamity, and their own misery; their wives and surviving companions made repeated signals in the main island. Finding there was no other timely resource, after the first violence of their anguish began to abate, they bethought themselves of securing some wild fowl for provisions; they lived on these and the flesh of the sheep that graze there all the year over. Before they quitted this prison, the skins of these sheep, and of the larger fowls, tacked together

gether with feathers, were all the clothing that some of them wore : what a grotesque figure they made in this distressful situation, one may easily imagine.

It was providential that *Boreray* was the place of their exile. The *Staller's* house or curious grotto, of which an account has been given already, afforded them a very comfortable habitation. Here they slept securely all night, and loitered away the whole winter season. They had taken the necessary precaution to dry some turf in the best way they could, and enough of that to last till the spring should be pretty far advanced.

On the return of the wild fowl, in the month of *March*, after having relieved their own necessities, they laid up in their store-house a cargo of these, sufficient to load the steward's eight-oared boat. Their friends at home, willing to give them the satisfaction of knowing that their share of the arable ground was not neglected, turned up ten different small spots of ground on the northern face of the hill which stood over against them. In fine,

the ten prisoners remained in this situation without sustaining any great loss, other than that of being much out of humour, till relieved in the month of *June* by the Steward.

CHAP.

## CHAP. XI.

*Of the people of Hirta. Their number, diseases, persons, dress, language, genius, manners and customs.*

IT is a fact indisputably true, that the inhabitants of *St. Kilda* were much more numerous heretofore than they are at present. Whether this visible decrease is to be resolved wholly into physical causes, or whether it ought to be imputed to political ones in part, I shall not determine; I shall only venture to affirm, that the island, if under proper regulations, might easily support three hundred souls. *Martin*, who visited it about the end of the last century, found an hundred and eighty persons there.

The number is now dwindled down to eighty - eight: an extraordinary change this in less than two generations: it is true indeed, that a contagious distemper swept away the greatest part of this people about four and thirty years ago.

The distemper which in so great a measure depopulated *St. Kilda*, was the small pox: one of the people there, upon coming to *Harris*, was seized with it, and died there: unluckily, one of his friends carried his cloaths away next year, and these, it is thought, communicated the infection at *Hirta*.

Very few of that little community escaped the plague of that year; of twenty-one families, four grown persons only remained, and these had the burden of twenty-six orphans to support: that these four lived, was owing to what the very men who were saved must have at first called a singular misfortune.

Before the distemper was propagated, three men and eight boys were sent into one of their islands, with a design of catching Solan-Geese for the benefit of the whole community: an universal confusion and mortality ensuing at home, they continued there from the middle of *August* till about the middle of *May* in the following year. The boat in which these men had been wafted over into that  
island



island was brought back to *Hirta* before the distemper became epidemical. Had they been at home with the rest, it is more than probable that their fate had been the same with that of their friends.

Before this memorable year, the small pox had never visited *St. Kilda*: the consequence must have been, that every genuine *Hirta* man was an absolute stranger to the proper method of managing it; all medicines, and those who administer them, lay quite out of their way; and it is very probable, that the gross aliments always used in that place, perhaps beyond the common rules of temperance, and, together with that disadvantage, the habitual uncleanness of the natives, to which may be added the feculent air pent up within their dirty hovels, had a particular quality to inflame that cruel disease into a more than ordinary degree of virulence.

This terrible distemper has never since visited *St. Kilda*.

The *St. Kilda* infants are peculiarly subject to an extraordinary kind of sickness: on the fourth, fifth or sixth night after their birth, many of them give up sucking; on the seventh, their gums are so clenched together, that it is impossible to get any thing down their throats: soon after this symptom appears, they are seized with convulsive fits, and after struggling against excessive torments, till their little strength is exhausted, die generally on the eighth day. I have seen two of them expire after such agonies. It is surprising that *Martin*, who was himself bred to physic, and a person of unbounded curiosity, should have past over in silence a circumstance so very striking, supposing that this very uncommon distemper had got any footing at *Hirta* in his time.

Another very remarkable disease that attacks this place occasionally, is a very severe cold, sometimes attended with spitting of viscous bloody matter, every time the *Harris* people come among them, or strangers from any other quarter.

“ They

“ They have generally good voices (says  
“ Mr. *Martin*) and good lungs ; to this  
“ the Solan-Goose egg supped raw doth  
“ not a little contribute ; they are seldom  
“ troubled with a cough, except at the  
“ steward’s landing, which is no less rare  
“ than firmly believed by the inhabitants  
“ of the adjacent islands.

“ Those of *St. Kilda*, upon the whole,  
“ gave me the following account : That  
“ they always contracted a cough upon  
“ the steward’s landing ; and it proves a  
“ great deal more troublesome to them in  
“ the night time, they then distilling a  
“ great deal of phlegm. This indisposi-  
“ tion continues for some ten, twelve or  
“ fourteen days ; the most sovereign re-  
“ medy against this disease, is their great  
“ and beloved catholicon, the gibain (*id est*)  
“ the fat of their fowls, with which  
“ they stuff the stomach of the Solan-  
“ Goose, in fashion of a pudding ; this  
“ they put in the infusion of oat-meal,  
“ which in their language they call bro-  
“ chan ; but it is not so effectual now as  
“ at the beginning, because of the frequent  
“ use of it. I told them plainly, that I  
I 5 “ thought

“ thought all this notion of infection was  
“ but a mere fancy ; and that at least it  
“ could not always hold ; at which they  
“ seemed offended, saying, That never any  
“ before the minister and myself was heard  
“ to doubt of the truth of it, which is  
“ plainly demonstrated upon the landing  
“ of every boat ; adding further, that every  
“ design was for some end, but here there  
“ was no room for any, where nothing  
“ could be proposed. But, for confirma-  
“ tion of the whole, they appealed to  
“ the case of infants at the breast, who  
“ were likewise very subject to this cough,  
“ but could not be capable of affecting it;  
“ and therefore, in their opinion, they  
“ were infected by such as lodge in their  
“ houses. There were scarce young or  
“ old in the island whom I did not ex-  
“ amine particularly upon the head, and  
“ all agreed in the confirmation of it. —  
“ They add farther, that when any fo-  
“ reign goods are brought thither, then  
“ the cough is of longer duration than  
“ otherwise. They remark, that if the fe-  
“ ver has been among those of the ste-  
“ ward’s retinue, though before their ar-  
“ rival there, some of the inhabitants are  
“ infected

“infected with it. If any of the inhabitants of *St. Kilda* chance to live, tho’ but a short space, in the islands of *Harris*, *Sky*, or any of the adjacent islands, they become meagre, and contract such a cough, that the gibain must be had, or else they return to their native soil. This gibain is more sovereign for removing of coughs, being used by any other islanders than those of *St. Kilda*, because they love to have it frequently in their meat as well as drink; by which too frequent use of it, it loses its virtue. It is very remarkable, that after this infected cough was over, we strangers, and the inhabitants of *St. Kilda*; making up the number of about two hundred and fifty, though we had frequently assembled upon the occasion of divine service, yet neither young nor old among us all did so much as cough once more.” This is the account which Mr. *Martin* gave of this infection in the year 1697. The same account has been often confirmed to me by many in my parish, whose veracity I had no occasion to call in question; and who visited the island almost annually since that period, and



and never knew the inhabitants to have once escaped this contagion. The honourable and reverend society, and some ingenious gentlemen, who joined me in my suspicion as to the truth of this fact, recommended to me to enquire into it very particularly: And I can assure them and the public, that every man in *St. Kilda*, and every man in *Harris* that ever visited *St. Kilda*, are unanimous in affirming it to be true. Though my testimony may serve to corroborate a fact, which I once could not believe, I cannot deny it without committing a trespass against truth. When I landed, all the inhabitants, except two women in child-bed, enjoyed perfect health, and continued to do so for two days. I began to conclude, with pleasure, that my visit would do them no injury. But I concealed my suspicions, that I might not tempt them to impose upon me, in order to prevent me from detecting a trick, which was perhaps originally contrived for some political ends (to justify, for instance, their aversion to strangers, who often come to oppress them) and continued for ages afterwards, from a pride which often makes mankind reluctant

hesitant to confess, that they were either ignorantly or designedly mistaken. This far-fetched suspicion had no foundation. The *St. Kildians* are fond of strangers, and it is improbable that a trick of this kind, supposing we could assign a sufficient cause for contriving it, could be carried on by the whole community so very artfully, as to prevent a discovery for so many years. But my doubts and suspicions were soon removed. On the third day after I landed; some of the inhabitants discovered evident symptoms of a violent cold, such as hoarseness, coughing, discharging of phlegm, &c. and in eight days, they were all infected with this uncommon disease, attended in some with severe head-achs and feverish disorders: so that without rejecting the most convincing of all evidences, the evidence of my senses, I was not able to suspect that their complaints at that time, were either feigned or imaginary. Before I went to the island, I was willing to imagine, upon supposition that this strange distemper gets in among that people on such occasions, that those only who assisted in dragging the boat to land, and must have wrought themselves into a great heat,

heat, so as to have rendered themselves very susceptible of such a disorder, were the only persons affected; but upon a strict examination, I found that the whole body of the people, they who stayed at home, as well as they who laboured hard in assisting the strangers, were seized with it.

Another conjecture I had fondly entertained, that the violent agitation into which the people of this island had thrown themselves, frequently by over-acting their part in drawing up the *Harris* boats to land, must have made them obnoxious to this severe cold, which might afterwards infect those who stayed at home, was sufficiently confuted by a very plain argument. Some of his Majesty's troops had occasion to land at *Hirta*, in the year 1746, and though the natives gave them no manner of assistance, nor were of consequence over-heated, by a violent exertion of their strength, nor hurt by the salt water; at the same time it is certain, at least the natives and some of the steward's servants, who were then in *St. Kilda*, told me that the cold above described!

scribed attacked them with uncommon fury; and the *St. Kildians*, as I shall have occasion to observe below, without any prejudice to their health, undergo greater hardships and fatigues almost every day, than on occasions of this kind. A gentleman of skill, who favoured me with his opinion, calls this cold *an annual epidemic*; which will return periodically, whether strangers visit the island or not. It is true, indeed, that the steward is obliged to visit this island sometime between the end of *April* and the beginning of *September*, as it is quite inaccessible in any other season of the year; but he sometimes lands here in *May*, sometimes in *June*, *July* and *August*; and is it not very strange, that an annual epidemic should return in *May*, if the steward lands in that month, but not till the month of *August*, if the steward delays his visit so long? And is it not equally strange, that it should return three or four times in the summer season, if the steward should land so oft, and only once, if they have no more visits from him? The present steward's brother, who is a clergyman of our church, and a man of learning and veracity, told me,

me, that he saw the inhabitants of *St. Kilda* seized with this cold three different times, upon the landing of his father's boat as often, in the space of eight weeks.

I had a curious enough anecdote, concerning Mrs. *M<sup>c</sup>Leod*, a native of *Sky*, and widow of the late minister of *St. Kilda*, confirmed to me by herself and others: for three years after she went to the island she escaped the general infection; but afterwards being as it were, in some measure, become a native of the place, she was seized with it annually during her stay in the island.

The smell of their houses, cloaths and breath, is very offensive to a stranger; he is uneasy when a *St. Kildian* is near him, and for two or three days he breathes a thick loathsome air. A man would have no difficulty in believing, that the stranger should be affected with some uncommon disorder on his landing; but that the quantity of fresh air which he carries about him, or the smell of his cloaths, or breath, should affect the natives, is very improbable and indeed quite unaccountable; although:



although they will tell you, that your company for some time is as offensive to them, as theirs can be to you; and that they find a difficulty in breathing a light sharp air when they are near you.

I confess I was long a sceptic, as to the reality of this distemper; but the account which Mr. *Martin* gave of it in 1697, the repeated assurances given me by men of understanding, and undisputed veracity, above all, ocular demonstration, convinced me that my doubts were ill founded. There are many appearances in nature which are unaccountable to us, and of which we must ever remain ignorant; and a fact which cannot be accounted for, may be supported by evidences which will force conviction.

The more adult persons in this island are remarkably healthy, and less subject than others to distempers.

It has been already told, that the inhabitants of *St. Kilda* are now decreased down to eighty-eight souls: of these thirty-eight are males, and fifty are females.—

This

This great inequality of the sex may be very rationally explained, without adopting the doctrine taught by writers of voyages and travels, who will have it, though in direct opposition to the established order of Providence every where else, that nature, by sending more women than men into the world, in some countries, must have meant to introduce polygamy there. In maritime or warlike nations, males are, it is plain, more subject to untimely deaths than the females; and among the *St. Kildians*, though neither a fighting or commercial people, the case is the same, and the reason obvious. Some of their men are destroyed by rocks; and in all countries the males are more ready to run away from out of the reach of tyrants, because more obnoxious to the resentment of such, and better able to shift for themselves.

All the adult males now at *Hirta* are no more than twenty - two. These are stout hardy fellows, and though generally speaking short of stature, extremely thick and brawny, but rather clumsily made than nicely proportioned; they are remarkably strong,

strong, carry huge burdens, and will tug at the oar for many hours, with an almost undiminished vigour. In their nocturnal expeditions they undergo great hardships, and make very light of the fatigue and dangers attending these, if fortune is propitious.

The women here are mostly handsome, and their complexion fresh and lively, as their features are regular and fine: the females in the islands most contiguous to *Hirta*, are in these respects greatly inferior to them; there are some of them, who if properly dressed, and genteely educated, would, in my opinion, be reckoned extraordinary beauties in the gay world.

The cloathing of this people is quite coarse, and made for warmth; all the colours known among them, till of late, were black, white, grey and brown, the natural colours of their sheep, and yellow was their only artificial one. There is a plant, in much the greatest parts of the western isles, which the inhabitants call Rue: I am a stranger to its true *English* name; it may be the same, for aught I know,

know, with the *Ruta* of the *Romans*; and a *Latin* proverb\*, which imports, that a person or thing is confined within a narrow compass, seems to favour that notion. This plant rises in the summer time about a span length above the ground, having a small hard stem which carries a yellow odiferous flower: it loves a sandy ground, and spreads its long, tough and numerous roots very far: these roots, if pounded and boiled, produce a durable red colour, which grows brighter every day: the *St. Kildians* are unacquainted with the art of dying with this root, though universally practised in the other isles.

All the linen manufactured among them is a mere trifle, and extremely coarse: one holiday shirt will satisfy the ambition of the most elegant or foppish person in *St. Kilda*: what they wear next to their skin, upon ordinary occasions, is made of wool.

The weavers here understand their business very ill. Every man is the taylor and

\* In rutæ folium conjecti.

and shoe-maker of his own family: all the leather of this island, and those nearest to it, is tanned with the tormentil root; and done to great perfection\*.

The *St. Kildians* speak a very corrupt dialect of the *Galic*, adulterated with a little mixture of the *Norwegian* tongue: they have many words and cant phrases, quite unintelligible to their neighbours: their manner of pronouncing is attended with a very remarkable peculiarity: every man, woman and child, has an uncorrigible lisping: not one of them are able to give their proper sounds to the liquid letters. This incapacity universal here and no where else, I suppose, may have been originally owing, perhaps, to a vicious affectation of imitating the manner in which some great man among them, either  
a steward

\* The *St. Kildians* lay the leather, when sufficiently prepared for that purpose, in the warm infusion of this bark for two nights, and afterwards keep it in the hollow of a rock, which is under water at every full sea, with some of this root pounded about it, until it is sufficiently tanned.



a steward or venerable ecclesiastic, did pronounce. To resolve this defect or impropriety into the construction of their organs, the nature of their food, or the temper of the climate, three suppositions that have been made, will hardly stand the test of reason. We are told somewhere, that the courtiers about *Alexander the Great*, studied much to wry their necks, in imitation of their master; and we know that some persons affect to lisp, out of a fond conceit that there is a peculiar sweetness, or harmonious softness, in sounds so pronounced.

The power of music is felt every where: that divine art has charms enough to conquer the most savage heart. The *St. Kildians* are enthusiastically fond of it, whether in the vocal or instrumental way: the very lowest tinklings of the latter, throws them into extasy of joy. I have seen them dancing to a bad violin much to my satisfaction: even the old women in the isle act their part in the great assemblies, and the most agile dancers are here, as well as every where else, very great favourites.

They

They delight much in singing, and their voices are abundantly tuneful. The women, while cutting down their barley in a field, or grinding their grain on their hand-mills in the house, are almost constantly employed in that way; and the men, if pulling at the oar, exert all the strength of their skill in animating the party, by chanting away some spirited songs adapted to the business in hand. The seamen of *Athens* practised the same custom.

It will be thought that a very small portion of the poetical spirit, if any, has fallen to the share of illiterate men, doomed to live in a cold, foggy and barbarous climate, into which the arts and sciences have never travelled. The air of *Hirta* is undoubtedly gross, and it is certain that *Apollo* and the nine sisters have never been invoked there: but I will venture to affirm, that one may easily discover strong sparks of fire, and some noble flights of fancy, in their otherwise homely compositions. Every region, however cloudy or distant from the sun, is capable of producing a great and original genius. The fogs of *Bæotia*, and the mountains of *Thrace*,

*Thrace*, have given birth to illustrious poets, while the scorching plains of *Afric* have not furnished the world with any curiosities of that kind: it will be easier to trace out the Muses in *Lapland* and *Ice-land*, than to find either spirit or works under the line.

The subjects handled by the bards of *St. Kilda*, in their odes, are the beauty and accomplishments of their favourites among the fair sex, the heroic actions of their friends, their dexterity in climbing rocks, their superior skill in fishing, their extraordinary vigour, skill and constancy, while at the oar, besides the common topics of personal advantages and intellectual merit.

Could it happen that one of a great poetical genius should for some time live in this truly romantic place; a place that always presents grand objects and strange landkips, a boundless ocean, immense precipices, hills unsung, whose summits are lost in the clouds, a prodigious variety of birds, and these beyond the reach of numbers, sometimes a confused heap of monstrous sea-animals, and at all times

times a most curious race of intelligent beings, to say nothing of noble cataracts, purling streams, and chrystal fountains, equal perhaps to those of *Helicon* and *Castalia*; it is my opinion that he might very easily, to speak with *Milton*, pursue

*Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.*

All the *St. Kildians*, except three or four smatterers, are perfectly illiterate.—The first person who introduced the use of letters among them, was one *Buchan*, who officiated in the station of a catechist here during the reign of Queen *Anne*.—The same man afterwards, at the desire of the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge, ordained a minister by the Presbytery of *Edinburgh*, and sent into this isle in that quality.

By the voluntary contributions of some piously disposed persons in that city, *Buchan* had been enabled, before his ordination, to train up some *Hirta* boys at his school: the progress made by these was, I am afraid, considerably greater than any thing that has been done there during

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the

the incumbency of his successors. The truth is, the people have an aversion, not easily to be conquered, for all foreign languages; and the reason is plain; they have no kind of intercourse with those who speak or understand these tongues: the consequence is, that religious considerations only can prevail with them, to subject their children to the expensive drudgery of learning the *English*; and we all know that considerations of that kind, operate too slowly, in all places, when opposed by temporal advantages and the power of custom.

The islanders in general are unfashionable enough to possess the virtue of hospitality in an eminent degree: in such remote places, the wise lessons of a parsimonious exactness have not hitherto been taught with any great success: to oblige the wealthy, to relieve the poor, to entertain the stranger and weary traveller, nay to leave their doors open to every one, were heretofore the reigning maxims there. The *St. Kildians* retain much of this primitive spirit; they are remarkably generous and open hearted; to me they paid  
more



more than a just deference, in this and every other respect; and to the crew they made many more presents of eggs and wild fowl, than either their taste or necessities demanded.

In their own way they are very complaisant and mannerly; the women never approached us without low curtsies; and the men never addressed the strangers, but in terms of the most profound respect.

They marry early, and their gallantries are generally innocent: impurities fashionable elsewhere, if committed here at any time, are never unattended with infamy. The character given to the old *Germans*, is undoubtedly applicable to this people: "No one among them makes a jest of vice; to debauch, or be debauched, is not called the way of the world\*."—Here high portioned wives never rule their husbands: here a cruel step-mother never persecutes her guiltless step-son for the sake of self: here the nuptial tie is always held sacred.

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\* *Tacit. de mor. Germ.*

An honest desire of preventing or removing the inconveniencies of a single life, or pure disinterested love, are the ruling passions in the advances they make to matrimony. Should a young fellow be possessed of a spade, rake, creel, and fowling rope, he marries without any fear or solicitude, will maintain himself, his wife and children, live contentedly on a small plot of ground, and pay his rent punctually with barley and feathers.

Drunkenness is not yet introduced here: but the *St. Kildians* could be reconciled without any difficulty to spirituous liquors. They have a most violent passion for tobacco; a branch of luxury, of which the total want of that commodity can only cure them: they buy an annual store of this favourite plant from the steward, which, in spite of a very strong appetite, they must take care to manage with the exactest œconomy, as it is impossible to procure a new supply, till the market of another year returns with him. For this universally bewitching article, and for some other goods indispensibly necessary, salt, iron, and timber particularly, they barter away

away their cows, sheep, grain and feathers.

Their riches consist in these commodities: they have frequently heard of gold, without thirsting for it: they have not touched coin of any kind, I believe, before this age: they are now perhaps possessed of a score of shillings and some brass pence, more than will pay off the debt of their whole state. *Tacitus* was at a loss to determine, whether the Gods who denied silver and gold to the *Germans*, were propitious to them or angry: had he been at *Hirta*, I am apt to believe, his scepticism with regard to that point, would have been soon cured. The people there have scarce any wants, and consequently scarce any desires of the pecuniary kind.

## CHAP. XII.

*Of the state of Religion at St. Kilda, in different periods.*

IN the former part of this account, I have endeavoured to shew, that Christianity was introduced into this isle by some one of those primitive teachers, who in this country and in *Ireland*, were called *Keledees*, or the servants of God. If one consider that spirit of converting, by which these honest primitive Christians were animated, and their violent passion for a solitary life at the same time, nothing can be more probable.

It is impossible to discover by whom the little holy fabrics, dedicated to *Christ*, *Columba* and *Brendan*, in the language of that place called temples, were erected: but we may have reason to believe, that they were built before genuine Popery came to its full maturity in this kingdom.

After

After the ecclesiastics of the *Roman* communion had extended their power and usurpations to the remote parts of *Scotland*, it is probable that some few of them did occasionally visit *St. Kilda*. That not one of that order had his constant residence there for some time before the reformation was carried into the north-west islands, appears from a passage in *Buchanan*, on whose testimony, in a matter of this kind, any one may safely depend:—  
 “The inhabitants of *Hirta*, says he, are  
 “totally unacquainted with all arts, and  
 “more especially with religion. The pro-  
 “prietor of the island, after the summer  
 “solstice, sends thither his procurator, and  
 “in his company a priest, who is to bap-  
 “tize the children born in the preceding  
 “year: but in the absence of a priest,  
 “on that occasion, every one baptizes his  
 “own children\*.”

In this state, matters continued for about an hundred years longer: the *St. Kildians* wanted teachers regularly ordained all that time. That some designing, avaricious

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men,

\* Hist. lib. I. c. 41.



men, exercised the more easy parts of the sacerdotal function in that interval, one at least of that character, appears from a merry story, which the ludicrous decision of a gentleman has transmitted to posterity.

This gentleman was called Colonel *McDonald*, the father of that Col. *Alexander McDonald* who was sent into *Scotland* by the Marquis of *Antrim*, at the head of a body of *Irish* foldiers, in the reign of King *Charles* the First, and signally distinguished himself in our civil wars under *Montrose*. This gentleman, having made himself obnoxious to the laws, fled to *St. Kilda*.

An impostor there claiming a right to tithes or some religious perquisites, a part of the people refused to pay the tax, and pleaded that he was absolutely unqualified for the priestly office. Their great objection was, that this ghostly father was not able to repeat the *Pater-Noster*. The pretended teacher had a faction to support his cause; at length the two contending parties, after many hot altercations, submitted the matter in dispute to the more learned

learned stranger. Mr. *M'Donald*, either attached to the new doctor of divinity, or willing to divert himself and others with a witty conceit, declared to the whole assembly, with a very serious air, that in the whole course of his life and reading, he had not seen a Clergyman deposed, or turned out of his living, for being unacquainted with the Lord's prayer. The party in the opposition were either satisfied or silenced, and the intruder began immediately to levy his taxes.

About fifty years after the reign of this almost harmless usurper, a person of much greater abilities, and of more dangerous views, scorning to be confined within the mediocrity of easy enough circumstances, formed the bold design of raising a little spiritual empire here. This man, though perfectly illiterate, had penetration enough to see, that an implicate belief of every thing taught by an ambitious ecclesiastic, is an excellent foundation for the great superstructure of a blind submission on the one part, and an absolute power in every thing on the other. The name of this impostor was *Roderic*, who for the vastness

of his ambition or the large size of his body, was by his countrymen dignified with the lofty epithet of the Great.

*Martin*, in his description of the western islands, has given us a short history of this strange man. To save my reader the trouble of having recourse to a book now rarely found, and to give at the same time a connected state of the progress of religion or superstition at *St. Kilda*, thro' different periods, I shall take the liberty to give a short review of this same extraordinary man's life and character.

The impostor was a native of *Hirta*, and though born in this land of darkness and simplicity, had a vast share of sagacity and cunning. *Ambition* was his leading principle, and *Lust* his secondary passion; *Avarice* was another strong ingredient in the composition of his mind.

He had frequent occasions to observe, that his countrymen were an ignorant, silly, injudicious rabble, and withal very desirous of having a spiritual father among them. Conscious of his own superior abilities,

lities, and ready to embrace an opportunity so favourable to his extravagant notions of greatness, he laid the design of enslaving the whole community to which he belonged, and of rendering himself the Lord of their consciences, freedom and fortunes. To carry this great scheme into execution, he had too much sense not to see, that it was necessary for him to assume the character of an ambassador from Heaven. The legislators of antient times, *Zoroaster* and *Zamolxis*, *Pythagoras*, *Zaleucus*, *Minos*, *Rhadamanthus*, *Romulus*, *Numa*, *Thor* and *Wodin*, supported their claims to power, and established their laws by the help of those divine revelations to which they pretended. All these men made religion the great engine of their policy:—they saw clearly that government must soon be unhinged, in a country where downright irreligion prevails. Without a constant train of miracles, or the general belief of a providence and a future state of retribution, it is impossible that great societies can flourish or stand for any long time, and this is a demonstration, that religion, though much abused, and very often perverted, must have come originally from

from the father of mankind, the founder of societies, the author of order, of government, and every thing that is conducive to the happiness of individuals, or collective bodies of men. If any one should teach a contrary doctrine, we should wish him no heavier punishment than to live for a long course of years in a society of Atheists, or men who are under no obligation to practise the virtues of social life.

The impostor of *St. Kilda* was an absolute stranger to all the legislators of ancient nations. But his own unconfined and self-taught genius suggested to him, that he could not possibly rule the kingdom of *Hirta*, a great kingdom in his eye, without the forgery of a divine commission. Full of his grand project, and possessing an imagination fertile in expedients, he affected for some time to be much out of conceit with the world, and to be fond of retirement, spiritual exercises, and a contemplative life. After he had thus prepared himself for the part he had to act, he at last appeared on the stage. At first he whispered in corners, and



and with a seeming reluctance, that he had seen *John the Baptist* face to face, and had heard his voice. Finding that this grave tale was heard with attention and a pious awe, he took the liberty to make the same declarations in public, with an undaunted impudence, and in a very solemn manner.

This was not enough for his purpose; and therefore he took care to give them repeated assurances afterwards. Assurances supported by strong asseverations, and confirmed by the strictness of a very austere life, that this great saint or demigod, who had the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, Earth and Hell in his right hand, conversed familiarly with him his chosen servant every other day: nay, that he gave him an unlimited authority to do what he pleased in *St. Kilda*, while acting agreeably to his directions, and that all those who should presume to dispute against his mission; counteract his laws, or violate his sacred person, would incur eternal damnation in a future world, and be overtaken by some signal judgment in this.

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Having established his authority in some degree, by the strength of impudence and the help of some holy tricks, he began at last to harangue in public: his lectures flowing easily from the copious source of a strong natural eloquence, were heard with the devoutest attention, and believed implicitly. With the assistance of auricular confession, an article of faith and practice highly important to every spiritual tyrant, he was soon in the secret of every domestic transaction in the island, an advantage which rendered him very formidable.

The women were soon brought to be at his devotion: if any one of them, whose understanding or conscience he had not been able to debauch, entirely rejected his addresses, he immediately commenced a criminal prosecution against her in name of his master. The *Baptist* had it seems told him, that this rebellious woman had committed some flagitious action. To convince the public of her guilt, he laid his commands on her, in the most absolute manner, to walk over a beach made up of loose round stones. If a single stone was removed out of its place, or rattled  
against

against another, the accused person was declared guilty by his Inquisitor, and delivered over to his own secular arm. — The punishment inflicted on the unhappy criminal, was a complication of infamy, pain and danger; she was to stand naked under a high cataract, and a mighty torrent of water, which had been dammed up for some time, for that very purpose, was upon a signal given, let loose upon her with great violence.

To walk over a long beach of stones, loose, round, and not large, without moving one of them, would have been manifestly a greater miracle than with Queen *Emma*, to tread nine glowing plow-shares unhurt, or to go with the *Hirpini* of *Italy* through a burning heap of timber. *Varro* observes, that these *Hirpini* had a medicinal preparation which saved their feet from the power of the flames and live coals; and it is more than probable, that Queen *Emma* used preservatives of the same nature at her ordeal trial, if that part of her history be true: but the unhappy woman of *St. Kilda* had not the smallest chance of escaping.

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The people of *Hirta* were stupid enough, like many great nations, to swallow down every thing that was offered to them, however absurd, by a teacher sent them from God. The holy villain declared to them, that the *Baptist* had consecrated for his own use a spot of ground, which his chosen servant called *John's Hillock*. If any beast was sacrilegious enough to touch that hallowed ground, though very ill fenced, it was immediately killed, and by much the greatest part of the victim belonged to the priest, who had conversed very frequently with the Saint on that little hill. One of the present inhabitants told me, that his father, after having unfortunately disobliged the impostor, whose sovereign will was the only law of the land, thought it prudent to give him a sheep by way of peace - offering, begging at the same time that he would interceed for him with the *Baptist*. The oblation was sent into the prophet's house, but was rejected with scorn, indignation and strong menaces, because of a blemish. A cat had unluckily run away with one of its kidneys, and the sinner, in order to obtain a plenary remission, gave a new victim of the same kind next day.

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In this way did an impure, avaricious, insolent man, continue to debauch the obsequious part of the women — to punish those who were virtuous — and to lord it over the men in their consciences, rights and liberties for six whole years. I have already remarked, that private confession was his great engine of policy, and one may add, uncleanness: all that were initiated into his mysteries were taught, like the votaries of the *Eleusinian Ceres*, to conceal every thing under the pain of Hell-fire.

The deluded people had such a profound veneration for this little *Mahamet*, that the secret would have never transpired without an accident. Some of the steward's servants found this mighty Demagogue, and his infatuated disciples, assembled together under silence of night. The steward was at great pains to find out the meaning of this nocturnal conventicle. — The whole imposture was at last discovered.

Mr. *John Campbell*, the minister of *Harris*, Mr. *Martin*, the frequently quoted author



author of the description, and the steward, had no small difficulty in persuading *Roderic* to leave *St. Kilda*. He had been frequently told, that the proprietor of the island had a strong curiosity to see him, and was determined to promote him to places of honour and profit. His vanity was flattered, as the gentleman apprehended, that the *St. Kildians* might assemble tumultuously about them; and the false prophet had been assured, that the fame of his sanctity, eloquence, and extraordinary illumination, had spread far and near: but he was too sharp-sighted not to see the snare.

After a long struggle he gave his consent at last, was brought to *Dunvegan* castle, confessed all his crimes, and made a public recantation before the presbytry of *Sky*, which may be seen in their records.

The unhappy man went through a course of penance in that island, travelling about from parish to parish like a condemned malefactor, and declaring every where before the several congregations, that he had acted the part of a consummate villain, with

with all the outward marks of an internal contrition: all this happened in the reign of King *William*.

The memory of this impostor is to this day detested at *St. Kilda*, and his name loaded with imprecations. His posterity are now no more than two women, and these greatly abhorred. One of them, a very scandalous and wicked person, was the last pretender here to the faculty of being second-sighted. This unworthy woman inherits her grandfather's cunning, ambition, avarice and lewdness, in a very high degree. I took an opportunity of conversing with her, and enquiring concerning her second sight, she with her wonted insincerity disclaimed all pretensions to this gift, though formerly very ready to boast of it.

In the year 1704 *Buchan*, the same that has been mentioned in the former chapter, was sent into this island to instruct the poor people, who had been too long abused, and afterwards too much neglected. This man, after a very warm recommendation by the general assembly of  
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our national church, was greatly encouraged by that excellent gentleman, who possessed the estate of his family at that time, *Roderic M'Leod* of *M'Leod*.

After *Buchan* had been ordained, the Society, who before their public fund had risen to any considerable sum, had contributed for him out of their own private purses, settled a salary upon him in the year 1710. This missionary was diligent enough, and possessed a much greater share of zeal than his two immediate successors. The present incumbent, the fourth protestant minister of *St. Kilda*, is a man of sense, virtue and piety: but the precarious state of his health disables him from doing all the service he would incline, and will probably in a little time render him absolutely unfit for that station.

In the year 1709, *Mr. Alexander M'Leod*, a gentleman, who, to say nothing of those qualities which rendered him a considerable person in his own profession, being a counsellor at law, possessed in an eminent degree a virtue highly praise-worthy, tho' far from being a fashionable one, the love  
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of mankind in their most important concerns, mortified an annual sum of 300 merks *Scots*, for the benefit of all those who should in succeeding ages publish the tidings of salvation at *Hirta*. This sum, together with another mortification of 400 merks *Scots*, destined by that gentleman for pious uses, is under the management of the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge.

It will hardly be expected, after all the pains employed by a succession of ministers, whom the world may probably rank in the lowest class of public teachers, that the *St. Kildians* can have the exactest notions of the Christian institution. I must confess, that their apprehensions of the divine nature and perfections, are in some instances gross enough, though infinitely less so, than those of many antient and perhaps modern philosophers.

The belief of a destiny, or an unavoidable resistless fate, is one of the strongest articles of their creed; and it will possibly be found upon examination, that the common people in all ages, and in most countries,

tries, give into the same notion. At *St. Kilda*, fate and providence are much the same thing ; after having explained these terms, I have asked some of the people there, whether it was in their power to do good and evil. The answer made by those who were unacquainted with the systematical doctrines of divinity, was, that the question was a very childish one ; as every man alive must be conscious, that he himself is a free agent : but how a principle of free agency, and absolute fate, absolute predestination, absolute prescience, and particular providence, extending to the human will, may be reconciled, is a metaphysical question, on which no one has ever yet bestowed any serious reflections among the laity of *Hirta* : and here, for aught I can see, these poor illiterate men act more wisely, and perhaps more philosophically and religiously, than they, who like the fallen Angels of *Milton*\*,

In thought more elevate, will reason high  
Of Providence, fore-knowledge, will and fate,  
Fixt fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute,  
And find no end, in wandring mazes lost.

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\* *Parad. Lost*, book II. v. 558, &c.



The *St. Kildians* are devout; they attend divine worship very regularly, and strictly observe the Lord's day. Their morals are, and must be purer, than those of great and opulent societies, however much civilized. Some of them are rather free of vices than possessed of virtues: dissimulation, or a low sort of cunning, and a trick of lying, are their predominant faults: the temptation to these little mean vices is surely strong.

I have observed before, that every *Hirta* man pays a certain heavy tax, in proportion to the stock of various kinds he possesses; his interest inclines him daily to dissemble in this article, and a practice of lying soon becomes general and habitual.

A late able writer has observed, in his political system, that virtue flourishes best in Republicks, or what is much the same, in a land of liberty: but of all the vices that grow up under despotism, lies and hypocrisy are perhaps the most prevalent. Slavery will always produce an abject meanness of soul, the never-failing source of insincerity.

If this observation be just, the inhabitants of *Hirta* ought to have a large share of these unmanly vices. Undoubtedly they were kept in a slavish dependance. The doctrine of passive obedience, they understand better than those who are so fond of it in theory, and at the expence of others; though to the divine right, upon which the same men lay the foundation of it, they are absolute strangers.

I know the present steward will never oppress them; both his father and he have relieved them from many grievous taxes; but should their successors incline to renew them, the people can have no redress, they can have no access to courts of Justice. Those who will have it in their power to oppress them, are their supreme and only judges; and though it be true enough, that their governors are neither better nor worse than higher potentates; it is equally certain, that men in authority will incline to despotism. The *Roman* satyrist's observation is infallibly just. "Those who are quite averse to kill any one alive, will choose to have that in their power."

CHAP.

## C H A P. XHI.

*Whether St. Kilda be a place proper for a  
Fisbery.*

FROM the account given above of the vast multitudes of sea fowls that seek their food on this coast, we may very justly conclude, that there must be inexhaustible stores of fish there. Let us for a moment confine our attention to the consumption made by a single species of fowls. The Solan-Goose is almost insatiably voracious; he flies with great force and velocity, toils all day, with very little intermission, and digests his food in a very short time; he disdains to eat any thing worse than herring or mackerel, unless it be in a very hungry place, which he takes care to avoid or abandon. We shall take it for granted, that there is an hundred thousand of that kind around the rocks of *Hirta*, and this calculation is by far too moderate, as no less than twenty thousand of this kind are destroyed every year, in-

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cluding the young ones. We shall suppose, at the same time, that the Solan-Geese sojourn in these seas for about seven months of the year, that each of them destroys five herrings in a day, a subsistence infinitely poor for so greedy a creature, unless it were more than half supported at the expence of other fishes. — Here we have one hundred thousand millions of the finest fish in the world devoured annually by a single species of the *St. Kilda* sea-fowls.

If in the next place it be considered, that much the greatest part of the other tribes have much the same appetite for herring, and pursue it from place to place, in the several migrations it makes from one sea to another, the consumption must be prodigiously great. Taking these into the account, and allowing them the same quantity of food, and of the same kind, by reason of their vast superiority in point of numbers, though their stomachs are considerably weaker; we see there are no less than two hundred thousand millions of herrings swallowed up every year by the birds of a very small district of rocks, which

which occupy so inconsiderable a space in the *Deucalionian* ocean.

Should all the articles of this account be sustained, articles which seem to be no less just than plain, and should our curiosity lead us into a new calculation, allowing between six and seven hundred to every barrel, and enough in all reason; it is evident, that more than three hundred and thirty thousand barrels are annually carried away by such creatures of little use to the human species. We must except the *St. Kildians*, together with a few more, and add, at the same time, that the fowls of the air must vindicate their share of God's bounty, having undoubtedly an equal right to it.

Here a projector would have a rare opportunity of displaying his parts, and of amusing himself with the theory of a scheme, which in his imagination will soon or late do his country a very essential service; though perhaps never be carried into execution. In the seas about *St. Kilda*, and the other western islands, a person of such a fertile genius, and public-spirited



turn of mind, will readily discover mines of silver and gold, richer, in his fancy, than those of *Peru* and *Brazil*.

I cannot, for my share, be insensible, that there are no more than a few persons of a deep and correct understanding, who have a right to offer their advice to the publick, however ready the shallowest projectors are to do so; and every one knows, that a fishery - scheme encouraged by the *British* parliament, in another latitude, goes on but heavily. I shall therefore say no more than what is indisputably true, that the western islands are most advantageously situated for a trade of this kind; and that the seas, with which they are surrounded, teem with immense quantities and unequalled varieties of fish.

How far this natural source of wealth may deserve the serious attention of a commercial people; whether these intrusted with the administration of affairs should, in peaceable times, regard an object in appearance so very interesting, these only who have just and extensive views of trade have a right to determine. In the mean while

while it cannot be thought an unpardonable presumption in a man to affirm, that the first Monarch of *Great Britain* never gave such a clear demonstration of his skill in *King-Craft*, as in his attempt to prosecute this important business; and to introduce the spirit of industry in those remote parts, which nature has pointed out, as the places peculiarly destined by her for this branch of commerce.

Had that Monarch's scheme been vigorously pursued, the profits arising from it, profits never to be exhausted, and very seldom precarious, must have very probably given *Scotland*, had it continued a separate kingdom, some considerable weight in the political balance of *Europe*.

No one division of the old world, nor perhaps of the new, has been so richly furnished with these treasures, which may be fished up out of the sea, as this country. Our more industrious neighbours and rivals have long ago discovered the immense value of this extraordinary blessing, and have wisely improved it to their own advantage.

To assign the causes which have hitherto hindered the execution of this great and salutary scheme, which King *James* had the honour of forming, is no part of my province. I shall only observe, that new cares engrossed this Monarch's attention, after his accession to the throne of *England*; and that his design had been in a great measure frustrated, before he left his native country, by the wicked intrigues of some powerful self-interested men. But after all, the experiment made by that King in the *Lewis*, though feebly prosecuted by the Sovereign, cunningly traversed by a great highland family, and frequently interrupted by the natives, has produced very good effects. There is hardly any large tract of land equal in point of sterility to that part of the *Lewis*, where this fishery was no more than half established: but such are the profits arising from this branch of business, and so great the benefits arising from a spirit of industry; a spirit raised here by a colony of frugal and unweariedly active men sent from *Fife*; that the people of *Stornoway*, a very small village in that district, have, in spite of manifold disadvantages, found out the secret of commanding

manding more trading vessels, and consequently more money, than all their neighbours put together. The farmers here pay their rents by a very little attention to the fishing, after the business of the spring is over, and before the business of the harvest comes on. The present proprietor seems to be in the humour of encouraging sailors and others to settle here, and of forming schemes, which will probably carry this branch of business to some perfection. The latter attempts made in the fishing trade, about the western islands, though supported by encouragements not inconsiderable, have been but faintly, and perhaps improperly pursued, and for that reason only have hitherto become ineffectual.

The rocks to which the people of this island can have access with their angling rods, are only two, and these abundantly frightful to any other race of mortals. On each of them are ten sitting places, so they call the craigy declivities, where they plant themselves while at the fishing; and on every one of these, two men make a shift to stand or sit. There they catch a

variety of excellent fishes, cod, ling, mackerel, turbot, pollocks, perches, lithes, and some other kinds. The currents around the island are very strong, and I have already observed, that there is no harbour about the coast, unless one give that name to the bay, so that if fishermen should be soon or late employed here, their buffes should be able to stand the sea in all weathers, I mean from the latter end of *March* till about the beginning of *September*. There can be no impropriety in making another remark here. In some of the other western islands are many bays and harbours, equal perhaps to any in *Europe*. The buffes, as soon as reduced to the necessity of quitting the seas around *Hirta*, might easily secure themselves in these, and lie there, if unsuccessful, till the herring should cast up in some other place upon the western coast: nor is there any great cause to apprehend, that they will, after making such expensive trials, meet with disappointment more frequently than ships otherwise employed in more precarious branches of trade. Some of the more northern *Ebudes* will almost infallibly furnish vast shoals of herring every year;



year ; and at this very time, while I write this, any person may purchase in the island of *Sky* as many of that kind as will be enough for filling up a barrel, for less than one shilling: Nor is this almost incredible plenty of them unprecedented :—the case has been exactly the same last year, and often enough before it.

L. 5.

CHAP.

## CHAP. XIV.

*Of the first inhabitants of Hirta, its revolutions and present state.—Conclusion.*

SHOULD the most ignorant and unthinking person in *St. Kilda* be asked, how his little country was peopled for the first time, it would be impossible for him to give a more irrational account of that matter, than some of the wisest and most illustrious nations of antiquity, have given of their own origin. It was an old opinion, almost universally received among the vulgar, and patronized by some very shrewd philosophers, that in the beginning of the world, men were, by some strange prolific virtue, produced out of the ground like plants: for this reason the ancients generally called themselves the *sons of the earth*. The *Athenians*, though beyond comparison the most learned people of all *Greece*, and the great improvers of arts and sciences, had the weakness to assume the name of *Autochthones*, a name in their conceit

ceit honourable, though in truth ignominious and absurd; a name which signifies, that their ancestors sprung after the manner of mushrooms, out of the very soil which they cultivated.

*Cæsar* seems to have believed, that those who inhabited the interior parts of *Britain*, had no original connection with any other nation upon the *Continent of Europe*, and must have consequently been produced there. Were it possible to adopt a notion so inconsistent with the principles of sound philosophy, no less than with the dictates of true religion, the *St. Kildians* have perhaps the best right of any people in the universe to an original so romantic. —

“What man in his senses could think  
“of leaving *Africa*, *Asia* or *Italy*, and af-  
“ter exposing himself to the perils of a  
“terrible unknown sea, take it into his  
“head to settle in *Germany*, a region where  
“the ground makes so dismal an appear-  
“ance, where the climate is unfavourable,  
“where the arts of agriculture will not  
“sufficiently reward or indemnify the hus-  
“bandman’s toil, and where every thing  
“must be disagreeable to the eye, unless  
“it

“it happen to be one’s own country.”— This is the great argument, with which *Tacitus* attempts to prove, that the first inhabitants of *Germany* were *Indigenæ*, or the proper growth of that same land.— Let the author’s words undergo a small alteration, and the same argument will conclude, with some greater appearance of reason, that the first race of the *St. Kilda* people must have been *Autochthones*, *Aborigines*, *Indiginæ*, or the natural growth of *Hirta*. If one chuses to deny, that *God made of one blood, all the nations of men to inhabit the face of the earth*, it will be natural enough for him to adopt this hypothesis; and we know, that no tribe of men have become more egregiously foolish, than those who professed themselves to be wise.

But to dismiss this genealogical fancy of poets, philosophers, historians, and whole nations, to me it seems probable, that *Hirta* was at first peopled by pirates, exiles, or malefactors who fled from justice. Such men would have very naturally associated together, and formed a resolution of retreating to a place of safety, where  
the

the resentment and vengeance of the most powerful enemies could hardly approach them :— And that the people settled here of old, were under apprehensions of being pursued or invaded, appears from the vast pains they took to fortify an isle naturally impregnable.

If we can easily forgive that vanity, which induced some of the greatest and most sensible nations in the world to carry up their respective pedigrees to the *Trojans* of King *Priam's* race, or to those of that name, who left their country under the conduct of *Aeneas* and *Antenor* ; one can have no difficulty in pardoning the *St. Kildians*, for drawing their origin from an *Irish* worthy.

*Ireland* had the good fortune to pass among our progenitors for the mother of arts and sciences, and likewise for the land of sanctity and military glory ; but whatever pretensions antient *Hibernia* may have justly had to one or more of these characters, it is hardly credible, that one of her heroes would have settled himself at *Hirta*, though the name of the old fort there,



there, *Dun-sir-Bholg*, intimates clearly enough that either the founder, or those who gave it that title, must have had a profound respect for the *Irish*.

The posterity of those who were the true natives of *St. Kilda*, are distinguished by the surnames of *Mac Ille Mhoirre* and *Mac Ille Rbiabhich*. The former seem to have come originally from the *Lewis*, where that name continues to prevail, and the latter from *South Uist*. The *Mac Ille Rbiabhichs* value themselves not a little upon their connection with the Captain of *Clan Ranald*, to whom *South Uist* belongs. But from the *Galic* dialect spoken at *Hirta*, from the method of preparing the ground, and manufacturing cloaths there, it may with some probability be concluded, that the bulk of the people came at first from the northern extremity of the *Long Isle*.

Our antiquaries are generally agreed, that surnames were introduced into *South Britain* by the *Normans*, and into *Scotland* by King *David* the Saint, or his Father. Before that period we had clans without all doubt, that is to say, considerable bodies

dies of men, strongly connected with one another, and almost unalterably attached to one common head: but that we had hereditary surnames, conveyed from the father to the son, and from one generation to another, it is perhaps more than difficult to prove.

The *Athenians* had their *Phile* or tribes; the *Romans* their *Gentes* or clans; and before either of these nations existed, the *Israelites* were divided into twelve very great ones. It is unnecessary to show, that the names of these particular tribes, to which men belonged among these three mighty nations, were generally added to their proper ones. But that names corresponding with the former, names peculiar to certain tribes, clans or families, were before the twelfth century hereditarily affixed to the proper names of persons, is a point too hard to be established by any genealogist: the two *St. Kilda* clans already mentioned must probably be of a modern date, for I am apt to suspect, that *Hirta* was more than once depopulated since its first plantation, and consequently more than once re-peopled. The  
property

property or jurisdiction of that little isle must have belonged, soon after it began to be inhabited, to some great man in *Uist*, *Harris* or the *Lewis*; and if the proprietor should have neglected his vassals, or people there, for a course of years, and if the only boat of the isle should have been destroyed by time, or some unlucky accident, it seems evident, that the inhabitants may have perished totally, or have been reduced to a very small number. — Their instruments of agriculture would have been worn out, their fishing-hooks lost, the little isles and rocks, which furnished the greatest part of the wild fowl and eggs, would have been inaccessible, and every other resource, excepting that of their cattle, must have failed. From this supposition, which seems to be abundantly rational, as the highland chieftains were frequently at open war with one another for many years, and as the *St. Kilda* boat is peculiarly subject to casualties, I would infer, that the *Mac Ille Mhoirres* and *Mac Ille Rhiabhichs* were not settled in *Hirta* till surnames became fashionable, or common among the vulgar in the isles, a change which took place there not above four

four hundred years ago. Before that period, the names under which these of the highest ranks and fortunes there went were commonly patronimical ones, or appellations derived from the size or form of their bodies, the colour of their hair or clothes, some bodily imperfection or deformity, some mental or personal accomplishment, the name of the place where they were born, educated, or held a great sway, their profession, trade, manner of living, or some such characteristical mark of diversity.

Should any one observe here, that all this genealogical enquiry into the origin of the *St. Kilda* people, is at once unimportant and full of incertainty, I shall very freely allow the justness of the remark, reserving to myself, at the same time, the liberty of thinking, that this short discussion is equally authentic, and to a *Scotsmen* equally interesting, with the history of *Peruvian Incas*, that of the several *Dynasties of Egypt*, of the *old Emperors of China*, of the *first Kings of Assyria*, and of the small kingdoms of *Greece*, *Sicyon*, *Argos*, *Mycenæ*, *Athens*, and others.

I shall

I shall not undertake to determine, at what time the *Norwegians* began to infest the western coasts of *North Britain*: We learn from an old historical record, called the *Chronicle of Man*, published by *Cambden*, that *Godred Crovan*, an adventurer from *Iceland*, who had attended *Harold Harefager*, King of *Norway*, in his expedition into *England* immediately before the *Norman* conquest, made himself master of *Man* and the *Isles*, and that he and his posterity reigned over that little kingdom during the space of two hundred and sixty years.

It appears from the same *Chronicle* that *Somerled*, Thane of *Argyle*, forced away a considerable part of that little kingdom, the half probably, from the grandson of *Godred*, which he and his successors enjoyed with little interruption for many ages.

After *Alexander* the Third had purchased the kingdom of *Man* and the *Isles*, from the *Norwegians*, or had reduced it by the power of his arms, it would seem, that all the isles which lie to the north of *Cantyre*, fell to the share of *Somerled*'s posterity.



sterity, or were left in their hands, to be held of our *Scottish* Monarchs. In the number of these isles, *St. Kilda* was comprehended.

It is, I believe, no easy matter to trace out the name, nor of course the history of *Hirta*, with any degree of certainty, beyond the fourteenth century.

In a charter granted within that period, by *John, Lord of the Isles*, to his son *Reginald*, and confirmed by King *Robert the Second*, *St. Kilda*, under the name of *Hirt*, was made over, together with many other places, to the said *Reginald*: How, at the end of two or three generations, the property of this isle was transferred from the successors of *Reginald*, the predecessor of *Clan Ranald*, to the family of *Sleat*, now represented by *Sir James Mac Donald*, and how, in process of time, it fell into the hands of the Clan that now possesses it, is an useless enquiry; and were the question of greater importance, so contradictory are the accounts given, and so slender the historical evidences on every side, that any judicious person will chuse to leave

leave that matter undetermined. At this time the proprietor is *Norman MacLeod* of *MacLeod*; and *his* ancestors have possessed it for at least two hundred years back.

The present proprietor has given a lease of *Hirta*, and every thing pertaining to it, to a Cadet of his own family, with the yearly rent of about eleven pounds *Sterling*; and the predecessors of the same Lessee, have enjoyed much the same right, or one equivalent, for three generations back.

This is the person called the *Steward*, who, before this or his own rent can be made effectual, must be at the annual expence of fitting out a large Highland boat to bring his grain, feathers, and any other perquisites that fall to his share, or any commodities he buys from the people, to *Harris*, where he generally resides. It must be confessed, that the voyages made by him thither are attended with some danger.

In former times the principal persons of this little Commonwealth came yearly in their

their own boat to *Dunvegan*, the Proprietor's principal seat, and brought the small taxes they had to pay. There they were re-baptised, so tradition informs us, or the baptism which had been formerly administered to them at *St. Kilda*, by midwives, or old men, was in some manner confirmed, though perhaps uncanonically.

I am told that the great grandfather of the present *Mac Leod* was sponsor for an old man and his son, an adult person, at the same time; and upon the same occasion, the marriages of several couples who had cohabited together for many years, after having solemnly plighted their faith to each other at *Hirta*, were declared legal.

CON-

## CONCLUSION.

**F**ROM the account given of *St. Kilda*, under the preceding articles, it is evident, that the steward may, if he pleases, reign despotically over it; and will any man answer for a succession of absolute government? Humanity and religion are the only laws to controul him. From his sentence the helpless people neither dare nor can appeal to any other judge; such is the situation of their land, they cannot have recourse; nor is it in their power, were they men of spirit or letters, to transmit their complaints to the proprietor without the steward's privity: He may confine them within the isle during life, torture their persons if cruelly inclined, confiscate their goods, and do every act of violence, unless restrained by his own heart or understanding.

It will be thought that the minister's presence, advice, and remonstrances, may have considerable weight. Indeed this circumstance

cumstance ought to be a favourable one, and may be so too in some small degree. But as the minister is himself in some degree a prisoner, as his living here with any comfort, and his enjoying the very necessities of his subsistence, depend so much on the steward's friendship; it may be convenient for him to look on with a prudent taciturnity, if he intends to continue long in the place. I add further, that any one who undertakes to exercise the sacred function in this remote and uncomfortable little diocese, may be very reasonably thought a person of no great authority or influence.

But amidst a variety of unhappy circumstances, the *St. Kildians* have their own peculiar advantages. Born philosophers, they have sense enough to confine their ambition within the bounds prescribed by nature. *If to admire nothing*, be the great virtue and art to make men happy, and to keep them so, felicity may be found among them or no where.

Silver and gold, stately houses and costly furniture, together with the fantastic luxrui  
of



of dress, and the table, they neither have nor desire. To rise in fleets and armies amidst infinite toils and dangers : to earn posts or pensions, after having wriggled themselves into the favour of the *Great*, at the expence of honour and conscience : to create overgrown estates, after having practised all the vile arts of avarice, frauds, extortion, and servility, are passions and wishes, which Providence has kindly concealed from them. The humble blessings of bread and wild fowl, of peaceful cottages and little flocks, of angling rods and hunting ropes, are all the riches, honours, and profits they aspire after.

If at a distance from the seats of justice, they are absolute strangers to the law's delay. If ignorant and unphilosophical, they are libertines neither in belief or practice ; nor with learned speculations strike at the foundation of virtue, nor produce any breach of the public tranquillity or happiness.

They firmly believe the existence and providence of a Supreme Being, the immortality of human souls, the obligation  
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of morality, and the necessity of piety, righteousness and temperance. They are most luckily illiterate enough, not to have heard the unhappy names of those great reformers of a deluded world, and improvers of the human understanding, who openly assault these essential articles, or endeavour to undermine them.

The modern rules which oblige a reasonable being, under the pain of eternal infamy, to throw away his own life, or to plunge his sword in the bowels of his friend or neighbour: in other words, the laws of honour are too exalted to lie within the low sphere of their knowledge. The excesses of intemperance, the mad quarrels and extravagant frolicks of drunkenness, the shameful use of places dedicated to the service of lewdness and folly, of disgrace and misery, they never yet knew or felt.

In fine, if all things are fairly weighed, in the balance of unprejudiced reason, the *St. Kildians* possess as great a share of true substantial happiness as any equal number of men elsewhere.

Of those who may happen to read this account, some may think that I have been much too prolix in handling a very trivial subject; but I hope any part of the human species will not be thought too trivial to deserve our attention. Our fellow subjects and fellow Christians, have a right to our regard and sympathy: at any rate I think the *St. Kildians* may be ranked among the greatest curiosities of the moral world, and of course may be considered in a light which will render their history, without any great impropriety, or expence of time, the amusement of a few idle hours.



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